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ERNST LUBITSCH'S AMERICAN COMEDY

WILLIAM PAUL

Lubitsch and his three stars: Gary Cooper, Miriam Hopkins, and Fredric March.

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ERNST LUBITSCH'S AMERICAN COMEDY

WILLIAM PAUL

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Paul, William, 1944–
Ernst Lubitsch's American comedy.

Filmography: p.
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Lubitsch, Ernst, 1892–1947. I. Title.
PN1998.A3L8368 1983 791.43'0233'0924 83-5304
ISBN 0-231-05680-X
ISBN 0-231-05681-8 (pa.)

Columbia University Press
New York Guildford, Surrey

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Printed in the United States of America

Book design by Ken Venezio.

PN
1998
.A3L8368
1983

To Andy and Molly—
for years of good ideas, congenial conversation,
and enduring camaraderie.

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A NOTE ON THE PHOTOGRAPHS

Because movies by definition exist in motion, every still photograph reproduced from a film must misrepresent something of the original. Stills can of course provide a valuable memory jog for the reader, but since all stills are in fact a compromise I have opted here to use the more clearly defined production stills rather than actual frame enlargements. I have been careful to use photographs that were probably taken either during rehearsal or actual filming and as such are reasonably close to the final film. Where there is important divergence in camera set-up between still and film, I have described what the shot looks like in the movie.

Scenes from *Trouble in Paradise, Design for Living*, and *If I Had a Million*, pp. 59–63
Scenes from *The Merry Widow, Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, and *Angel*, pp. 121–127
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Scenes from *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown*, pp. 283–290

FOREWORD

William Paul's meditation on the movies of the late Ernst Lubitsch fills a virtual void in film scholarship. Somehow Lubitsch was too light for the earlier sociologically oriented film historians, and too late for the later stylistically oriented revisionist critics and scholars. Orson Welles once expressed amazement that the young French critics paid so little heed to Lubitsch's vast contributions to the medium. Indeed, Paul takes me and other critics to task for helping perpetuate the image of Lubitsch as a cinematic "pastry chef." My indiscretion in culinary terminology is identified as "concoction." Other such terms on Paul's hit list are "spicy," "frothy," "creamy," "tasty," "sparkling," and "effervescent." It is no wonder, Paul remarks, that Jean-Georges Auriol went so far as to compare the entire oeuvre to a restaurant, and the director himself to a genial, insouciant head waiter. Paul's feisty tone in this matter is motivated by a desire to make us acknowledge Lubitsch at long last as a "serious dramatist." This is film scholarship at its best, and I am very happy to acknowledge it as an invaluable contribution to the ever-growing field of film studies. Heaven knows that serious film scholarship has not received much encouragement from either mainstream publishers or mainstream book reviewers. Still, it persists, as in Paul's case, to continue illuminating the filmic landscape of our imagination.

I must reassure the reader, however, that Paul's text is not forbiddingly solemn in establishing Lubitsch's seriousness as an artist. Paul succeeds even in developing a theory of comedy without losing his sense of humor. In a sense, Paul's book reclaims Lubitsch from the limbo of lightheadedness celebrated with such laborious quaintness in Herman G. Weinberg's much overrated *The Lubitsch Touch*, an endless stream of anecdotal ramblings. It is to Paul's credit that he is concerned more with "grasp" than "touch." Hence, he does not isolate Lubitsch from his contemporaries in the name of a spurious "uniqueness" but, rather, reintegrates Lubitsch with the mainstream of world cinema from D. W. Griffith through Jean Renoir. Paul is particularly strong on such hitherto neglected Lubitsch masterworks as *Shop Around the Corner* (1940), *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), *Heaven Can Wait* (1943), and *Cluny Brown* (1946).

Paul was aided in no small measure in his study by Samson Raphaelson, one of Lubitsch's most gifted collaborators, and for several years, a very valuable member of the faculty of the Film Division in Columbia's School of the Arts. Paul has also done his homework on the Hollywood movie industry, and on just about every other book that has been written on Lubitsch. His writing thereby resonates with a casual expertise that should be especially exhilarating to the knowledgeable reader.

As to whether Ernst Lubitsch (1892–1947) is worthy of all this attention, opinions may differ. Certainly, his civilized virtues are in short supply in contemporary movie-making. Perhaps civilization itself is in eclipse. My own experiences in screening Lubitsch films for new generations of students suggest that he has become part of an infinitely precious classical tradition in film. The students may not understand exactly why in the well-mannered, good-natured world of Ernst Lubitsch, the most gracious civility transcends man's falls and pratfalls. But they respond nonetheless to the wit and virtuosity of the rendering. Paul's book succeeds in its cultural and historical amplitude in uniting film studies with all the other humanities. Lubitsch thus takes his place with Molière and Pirandello in the age-old dispensation of sardonic insights into the vanities and follies of our species.

ANDREW SARRIS

ERNST LUBITSCH'S AMERICAN COMEDY

INTRODUCTION

IN THE MARKETPLACE

In 1934 film director Ernst Lubitsch was appointed production chief of Paramount Pictures. Although he would leave the post to return to active film direction only a year later, he was and remains to this day the only creative artist to hold the top production-executive position at a major Hollywood studio since the coming of sound. Yet in spite of his apparent power, in March 1938 Paramount suddenly fired him as a director because of a commercial record so spotty it had become a matter of public record, as *Variety* was to report on April 6: "Banker influence in Paramount reportedly was the motivating factor in departure of Ernst Lubitsch from Par lot as producer after check-up of record showed that in last 11 years Lubitsch has produced only two pictures which were real money-makers. He has made an average of two yearly. Lubitsch is an expensive producer who always goes long on shooting with resultant heavy cutting in reaching final print."

"You're only as good as your last picture," runs an old Hollywood adage. Were this in fact true, almost every Lubitsch picture in the thirties should have been his last. But even in the final decade of his career he was oddly never at a loss for employment. Hollywood may have become a familiar symbol for venality and artistic corruption in our culture, but the simple facts of Lubitsch's career contradict this popular symbolism: not only was Lubitsch able to remain true to himself artistically and continue to survive repeated commercial failure, he actually thrived in the fast money world of the dream factory regardless of the success or failure of individual films.

Lubitsch's ongoing employability in Hollywood throughout his career suggests something of the schizoid nature of the old studio bosses' attitude toward movies. On the one hand they were factory chiefs trying to import mass production methods into an art form which critics frequently regarded more as product than art. On the other hand, they could show a genuine if naive and untutored respect and even awe for art and artists. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was the most factorylike and most profitable of studios, yet it felt compelled to take as its motto *Ars Gratia Artis*. Hollywood in its Golden Age was a place where Mammon could, without a trace of irony, seek to justify himself by decorously paying court to Art.

Prestige more than profit insured Lubitsch's artistic survival, but in emphasizing this survival I do not want to err in an opposite direction by making Hollywood out to be something of a beneficent welfare society organized for the benefit of unpopular artists. Lubitsch *did* make some commercially successful films, and in any case the movie business in the thirties and forties was generally so regularized that very few films actually lost money, certainly none on the scale that is common today. Finally, personality probably had something to do with Lubitsch's success. Erich von Stroheim and D. W. Griffith, both of whom had in the past scored much greater commercial hits than Lubitsch, nonetheless found themselves out of work in the thirties. But Griffith and Stroheim were widely regarded as arrogant and self-indulgent, Lubitsch as genial and disciplined.

Lubitsch's name is not sufficiently well known today nor are his films as frequently revived as they should be, but in the twenties and thirties he was one of the most highly respected and influential directors in Hollywood. He had been brought to America in 1922 by Mary Pickford in an aura of artistic achievement gained by the international success of his German costume dramas. After *Rosita* (1923), the Pickford film, Lubitsch signed a contract with Warner Brothers, then a minor studio with major aspirations to class that they hoped to achieve, more in promotion than actuality, by billing their films as "Classics of the Screen." While the Warners were no doubt bolstered in the confidence they placed in Lubitsch by the commercial successes of his German films, the desire to be regarded as a classy operation must account in part for the signing of Lubitsch. In fact, they were so impressed they gave him a contract granting total artistic autonomy, a working condition unusual in Hollywood, but one that Lubitsch even with his limited commercial appeal was able to obtain throughout his American career. Alone among his Hollywood contemporaries, Lubitsch *never* had to make a film that was chiefly a contractual obligation.

Lubitsch was as free from the marketplace as any Hollywood director has ever managed to be: even in commercial failure his position remained secure. And yet there is a paradox at the center of this individualistic artist's career: as independently as Lubitsch was able to function, his films from the early thirties on *reflect* trends and changes in American screen comedy of the period. While Lubitsch himself always acknowledged the influence of Charles Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* (1923) on his own work, the series of comedies he subsequently directed for Warners in the mid-twenties proved to be far more influential in themselves than the Chaplin film had been, leading the way for a distinctive brand of high comedy on American screens. In the thirties, however, Lubitsch's films more and more took their lead from films around them, often in idiosyncratic fashion, yet clearly reflecting changes in the marketplace itself.

Most art, and most especially dramatic art, operates within a marketplace, but the very profitability of the movie business and the quasi-industrial nature of a film's creation have given economic considerations an unusual prominence in discussion of film. From their earliest days the movies have been almost synonymous with money. Of course they hardly represent the first art in history where forces extrinsic to the act of creation have had an obvious hand in shaping the final work. But if economic considerations that affect films have generally appeared to critics as different *in degree* from those of earlier forms, that is chiefly because of the unprecedented size of the audience for film. As the mass audience itself became in effect a condition of creation, film more than any other art fostered an acute awareness of the contexts that surround an individual work, the role of genres and conventions in shaping the final film to fit audience expectations. Hollywood movies are not less art for all that, and even in the heyday of the Hollywood studios it was possible for a number of directors like Lubitsch to fashion careers of artistic integrity.

While all art must finally depend upon a knowledge of the context in which it appeared for a full understanding of its meaning, much writing on film creates false contexts that can obscure the meanings of an individual work. Hollywood genres, for example, are most often treated monolithically. A Western is a Western is a Western, yet what audiences expected from a Western in its epic and empire-building stage in the twenties is very different from what audiences expected from a Western in its neurotic and revisionist stage in the fifties: the changes in the genre reflect changes in the marketplace itself. Lubitsch is one of the most original creative minds to have worked in Hollywood, and yet as distinctive as his art may be and as free from the pressures of the marketplace as he was able to operate, his films nonetheless show a clear response to other films of their time.

In particular I am intrigued by what must appear a simple truth to anyone even cursorily familiar with Hollywood films of the thirties, namely that the romantic comedy *Trouble In Paradise* (1932), with its cheerily destructive anarchic sensibility, would be as inconceivable in the late thirties as the romantic comedy *Ninotchka* (1939), with its straightforward and serious political concerns, would be in the early thirties. Even an ahistorical and apolitical artist—and these are adjectives that might well fit Lubitsch in the first half of his career—has an intimate relationship with his period and his society, both of which finally determine creative characteristics as much as the artist's individual psyche.

PART ONE

THE ANARCHIC TOUCH

1917-1933

1

A TOUCH AND A VISION

Lubitsch has not been taken seriously enough in the past because comedy itself is not taken seriously enough. Yet the real genius of the American cinema has most often been found in its romantic comedies and its Westerns, two genres that are usually overlooked when critical awards are handed out. Frank Capra's comedies seem the apparent exception to this in the number of awards they garnered, but the awards are in fact a testimony to a didactic milieu that sets these films apart from most American screen comedy: their meaningfulness is forthright, their seriousness of purpose self-evident. Yet in the final analysis it is possible to see all comedy, even of the most trivial sort, as essentially didactic.

Henri Bergson in his celebrated essay "Laughter" has argued that "the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple." Far from being trivial, comedy is in fact the most intellectual of dramatic and narrative modes. It is always *about something* because we always laugh *for a reason:* a sudden insight, a shift in perspective, a detached and critical observation of the meaning of an action. Lubitsch's art is profoundly meaningful precisely because it is profoundly comic.

As is often the case with comedy criticism in general, most critical writing on Lubitsch has trivialized his art in the name of praising it, honoring his films chiefly for a clever lightness that must finally seem lightweight. Lubitsch's critical friends have done his artistic reputation a major disservice by establishing approaches to his art that are more appropriate to attack. In the process they rendered inaccessible the emotional riches of his later films, films that represent his greatest achievement and should be at the least as well known today as the heavyweight Capra comedies. The laudatory nouns and adjectives most frequently applied to Lubitsch's films—"champagne," "a honey," "spicy," "frothy," "creamy," "tasty," "sparkling," "effervescent"—are a little too insistent in their equating Lubitsch's art with food and drink, while that hoariest of film critics' clichés, "the Lubitsch touch," suggests more the art of a pastry chef than a serious dramatist. Yet even in his lightest comedies Lubitsch was a deeply serious dramatist, and if "the Lubitsch touch" is to regain any precise meaning as a critical term, then it should be used to signify the conjunction of lightness and seriousness, of gaiety and gravity that distinguishes Lubitsch's greatest films.

THE MEANINGS OF METAPHOR

The one aspect of Lubitsch's style that critics invariably pick up on is his oblique manner of presenting an action. The obliqueness is certainly important as it is the one aspect of Lubitsch's style that has probably had the most lasting influence on a wide variety of directors, ranging from Billy Wilder to François Truffaut. But there is something more to Lubitsch's manner than simple avoidance. When Lubitsch chooses to have his camera look at a door rather than what's taking place behind it, the door itself necessarily shapes our understanding of the event. Most of all the indirection of Lubitsch's style endows his films with a strongly metaphorical quality: in his apparent refusal to look at certain events or actions head-on Lubitsch in effect colors our perception of the main action with the object or event he chooses to look at.

A moment from *Anna Boleyn* (1920) will show the wealth of meanings Lubitsch can convey through the simplest of means.* The scene takes place on the morning following the wedding night of Anna (Henny Porten) and Henry (Emil Jannings), a night the drama indicates has been a difficult one for Anna. As Anna sits alone in a large room engrossed in her embroidery, King Henry and his poet friend Smeton enter behind her. Henry, always ready for a good joke in this film, decides to sneak up behind Anna and take her by surprise. As he reaches her, there is a close insert shot of Henry's dagger as he removes it from its sheath and cuts Anna's thread. In long shot again, Anna finds the thread broken, looks up to see Henry, and the two of them burst out laughing as if they had just witnessed an exceptionally funny prank.

The weight given the action of the knife cutting the thread establishes it as a metaphorical answer to the dramatic question raised by the previous scene: the cutting of the hymeneal knot and the relaxed and pleasurable reactions of *both* Henry and Anna suggest that Anna has overcome her sexual fears of Henry and perhaps renounced her infatuation with another man to embrace fully her role as Henry's wife. But there is something else here because the very slowness of the action in close-up gives something of a menacing emphasis to the withdrawal of the dagger and subsequent cutting that, with a sharp dramatic irony, foreshadows Anna's execution and conjugates Henry's sexual desires with his final murderous intentions toward Anna.

The effect of treating the bridal night in this indirect and metaphorical manner is twofold. First of all, by virtue of its analytical quality, the metaphor enables us to see more precisely into the *meaning* of the action *as Lubitsch wishes us to understand it* than a direct presentation of the action might have. Lubitsch's obliqueness, far from avoiding issues, constantly suggests it can cut through to the essence of an event as deliberately as Henry's knife cuts Anna's thread. The result is a style of discreet indiscretion that shows us nothing, yet tells us everything. Second, in the clear intervention of the director's hand needed to create the metaphor there emerges an ironic distance on the characters' behavior. We are necessarily set apart from and perhaps above the characters because the metaphor grants us a privileged and exact understanding of psychological motivation that the characters themselves do not possess.

The conjunction of metaphor and irony in this scene from *Anna Boleyn* provides the key to Lubitsch's style: the irony suggests the lightness of tone for which Lubitsch has so often been praised, while the metaphor creates a depth of meaning all too rarely perceived in his work. Yet if irony and metaphor seem to lead in the opposite directions of glibness and eloquence, they are nonetheless, as Wayne C. Booth suggests, fairly close to one another as expressive modes:

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* Plot synopses of all films discussed in the text may be found in the Selected Filmography appended to this volume.

> In reading any metaphor or simile, as in reading irony, the reader must reconstruct unspoken meanings through inferences about surface statements that for some reason cannot be accepted at face value. . . . It is not surprising, then, that many casual definitions of irony would fit metaphor just as well, and the two have sometimes been lumped together in criticism. (p. 22)

Lubitsch's ironies have long been seen and understood but not his metaphors, for which reason his work has been undervalued. The lightness of touch that pervades his films is a thing to be applauded in itself, but it literally presents only half the story. How different, and how much denser in meanings, Lubitsch's indirect style is from that of the directors he influenced may be seen with a comparison of scenes from *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) and Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth* (1937), where clocks are used as a displacement device to carry along the narrative.

The Awful Truth tells of a divorcing couple, played by Irene Dunne and Cary Grant, who discover in the course of the narrative how much they actually love each other. In the final scene they affect a reconciliation just before midnight, at which time their divorce is to become legal. They are staying in two adjoining bedrooms of a country house, connected by a near animate door that keeps blowing open at regular intervals seemingly with the purpose of reuniting them. The sequence is punctuated at quarter-hour intervals with insert shots of a musical clock that, on striking the quarter hour, has a man and woman in Swiss costume emerge from separate doors, do a stiffly mechanized little dance, and return to their respective doors. When husband and wife are finally reconciled, we see Grant enter Dunne's bedroom but not her bed; instead, McCarey cuts to the last shot of the clock just as it rings twelve, and the mechanical man, after his little dance, goes with the mechanical woman through her door. No great powers of inferential reasoning are needed to see the connection to the live couple or to decipher the meaning of the final action.

While this action is shown indirectly and is metaphorical in the strictest sense of the term, the feeling is not so much that of metaphor as simple substitution because the qualities that distinguish the clock—temporal or mechanical—are not meant to be applied to the emotions of the couple itself. The clock *does* encase the action in an ironic mode which assures the audience of the inevitable reconciliation while the characters continue in uncertainty. There is also a charming playfulness here that twits the prohibitions of a rigid censorship code which saw any sexual behavior outside the bonds of marriage as inherently immoral: part of the dramatic tension of the scene revolves lightly around the question of whether or not Grant will get into Dunne's bed by midnight, after which they will no longer be legally man and wife. The Lubitsch influence is clear both in the witty way of handling the scene and the ironic tone that results from this indirect manner, but that is the extent of it. McCarey's strongest interest lies not in metaphor, but in the acute and detailed observation of human behavior; it is the actors' performances *between* shots of the clock that give the sequence its dramatic impetus, not the shot of the clock itself.

In *Trouble in Paradise* Lubitsch shows the entire first night and blossoming romance between Herbert Marshall and Kay Francis through a series of clocks and off-screen exchanges between the two would-be-lovers. We do not see the characters at all until the very end of the sequence when they say goodnight to one another. If McCarey is finally more concerned with the emotional interaction of Grant and Dunne and uses his clock chiefly as a kind of dramatic punctuation, in *Trouble in Paradise* Lubitsch is concerned with time itself. The temporal metaphor in the Lubitsch film might conceal the actual event from us, but it does not so much lead away from it as bring us to a greater understanding of the growing romantic entanglements as the author wants us to understand them. The Lubitsch touch is not so much light as it is witty, and witty in the fullest sense of the word, for it always suggests an intelligence and knowingness in the way it views characters.

THE SHAPE OF A CAREER

Lubitsch might have operated within the ultra-commercial world of big-budget films, yet he nonetheless managed to have a career with a distinctive shape and coherent development that matches the career of any major artist working in a less dollar-determined medium. Seen by itself, momentarily isolated from the other films of its time, his oeuvre presents a unified body of work with its own characteristic profile and an internally logical evolution in style and subject matter from the earliest broad German farces to the late complex romantic comedies.

Lubitsch's name would become permanently identified in the sound period with sophisticated comedy, but a survey of the first half of his career, however, reveals three Ernsts—the crude Teutonic farceur, the historical tragedian, the romantic comedian—only the second of which is particularly earnest. Nonetheless, while individual films differed in genre, the strongly defined libidinal drives of the characters in all the films makes them all kissing cousins of one another. In the unbuttoned world of farce the free reign of the libido is most at home. In the more somber historical dramas a similar emphasis on libido sets any sense of history askew to honor the individual whose sexual drive is sufficiently powerful to take the whole world literally under its sway. In elegant romantic comedy sexual longing is hardly unusual, but what is particular to Lubitsch is the sexual vibrancy of his characters and their strong libidos which constantly threaten to shatter the well-mannered surface of high comedy. In all these characters through all these genres an aggressive individualism takes root and blossoms into a conflict with the libidinal drives of other characters as well as with the dictates of the social order.

If Lubitsch in the first half of his career through comedy and tragedy remains resolutely on the side of the individual, in his later comedies he will move beyond the individual to a vision that truly encompasses entire societies. As the social vision expands, there is a fascinating contrary movement that endows individual characters with greater emotional weight, a change that is partly the result of increased psychological refinement in an artist who continued to grow

through his last work, partly a result of his decreasingly ironic view of human personality.

In Germany Lubitsch had interspersed his big historical dramas with light farces, the farces outnumbering the dramas. Although he had been brought to America on the basis of the historical films, his work in the mid-twenties was chiefly comic. But with *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* in 1927, Lubitsch shifted back to history and remained there with his last two silent films, *The Patriot* (1928) and *Eternal Love* (1929). It was as if the historical dramas answered some artistic need to which he must always return. But with the introduction of sound he abandoned the historical films altogether: he had found a different way of meeting this need.

Four of the first five feature films Lubitsch directed from 1929 to 1932 were musicals. The coming of sound and contemporary fashion no doubt had something to do with this musical overflow, but Lubitsch had already been gravitating toward the form with his silent version of *The Student Prince*. In a sense, the Ruritanian musicals that began his sound period were important to Lubitsch because, however fantastic their settings, the royal characters that inhabited them enabled him to combine the social gravity of the historical dramas with the lighter tone of the romantic comedies. As a result of this series of musicals the straight comedies that followed in the thirties differ markedly from the comedies of the twenties in the more precise delineation of social background.

Why Lubitsch should have wanted to weave together the historical and comic strands of his career has something to do with the dramaturgical patterns underlying most of his films at the time, a pattern I have suggested focuses on the conflict between individual desire and the dictates of society. Northrop Frye, who argues that the "average movie of today [1949] is a rigidly conventionalized New Comedy," sees a pattern in New Comedy that is relevant here in its opposition of individual and social interests: "In all good New Comedy there is a social as well as an individual theme which must be sought in the general atmosphere of reconciliation that makes the final marriage possible. As the hero gets closer to the heroine and the opposition is overcome, all the right-thinking people come over to his side. Thus a new social unit is formed on the stage, and the moment that this unit crystallizes is the moment of comic resolution" (p. 59).

Placed alongside Frye's schema, Lubitsch's comedies are most peculiar for not moving toward a "new social unit" so much as returning to the status quo. Since the silent comedies generally deal with married couples, the return to the status quo represents a renewal of the various marriages that could possibly be interpreted as a movement toward a new social unit. But the musicals that deal with courtship clearly move their characters toward a not always willing acquiescence in the status quo. The social order that dominates at the beginning of the film continues to dominate at the end. In other words, with the musicals the plot patterns of the historical tragedies have been introduced into the comedies, so that the happy endings toward which the musicals always move seem both facile and forced.*

However much they were fantasy, the musicals with their fairy-tale kingdoms enabled Lubitsch to define more concretely the social order individual characters felt themselves oppressed by. In the tragedies, individual desires yield to or are conquered by the pressures of the dominant social order. In the musicals, the resolution of the conflict is generally confused, partly as a result of trying to make a bleak plot pattern conform to the optimistic expectations of the genre. But this confusion also seems to me a clear reflection of Lubitsch's artistic indecision at the time because his one nonmusical of the period and the only "serious" straight dramatic film of his talking pictures, *The Man I Killed* (1932), reveals a similar ambivalence.

At first glance, *The Man I Killed* is the most unusual of Lubitsch's sound films, his one apparent attempt to answer the occasional charges that he was wasting his enormous talent on trivial material. Yet, on closer inspection, the primary difference from the surrounding works emerges as a somberness of tone with which Lubitsch never seems entirely comfortable.

The underlying dramatic conflicts of the film are actually similar to the musicals, but staked out in more explicit fashion. The plot concerns Paul (Phillips Holmes), a young Frenchman, who had killed Walter, an equally young German soldier, in the final days of World War I. Overcome with feelings of guilt, Paul travels to the small German town of his victim in search of the dead boy's family. Initially hostile, Walter's parents (Lionel Barrymore and Louise Carter) and his fiancée Elsa (Nancy Carroll) soon accept Paul as a friend, for they mistakenly think he was Walter's friend in life. The rest of the town continues to be outraged by the presence of this Frenchman, but in the family he is quickly taking over the dead man's place, even to the point of becoming engaged to Elsa. Still overpowered by his sense of guilt, Paul tells Elsa his actual relation to Walter and wants to tell the parents as well, but she prevents him because she sees he must continue to fill the void of Walter's absence and restore the wholeness of the family.

One Hour With You (1932), the fourth of Lubitsch's muscials, must generally be excepted from my remarks on this genre; as a remake of his silent *The Marriage Circle* (1924) the film has more in common with the silent comedies than with the other musicals.

To the extent that the hero is set in opposition to the dominant society of the town, Lubitsch's one straight dramatic film follows Frye's pattern for romantic comedy: in Paul's union with the family against the town a new social unit of postwar harmony is forged that falls in line with the film's overt pacifistic message that all men of all nationalities must finally belong to the family of man. But if comedy normally ends with a liberating triumph for the hero, there is no real release for Paul in this conclusion. Rather, becoming part of the family requires active suppression not only of his actual identity but also of his overpowering feelings of responsibility for another man's death. There is a peculiar ambivalence in the ending in that the anguished feelings which initially motivated Paul's actions have only been covered over, not quieted. Much like the larger societies in the histories and musicals, the family exerts its own public demands on its members so that each member must finally subjugate his innermost desires and ultimately his individuality to these demands.

The Man I Killed is finally more interesting in conception than execution, for as Lubitsch's one "serious" film it proceeds with an unusually cautious tone that is especially noticeable in the lifeless playing of the leads. While the generally somber tone of the film at least makes the dramatic mood of the ending congruent with the rest of the narrative, there is nonetheless a sense of incompleteness in the resolution that allies this film to the musicals and their more problematic endings. *The Man I Killed* takes the form of a romantic comedy, but Lubitsch plays against comedy's naturally liberating force by having the status quo at the end. The artistic difficulty in this film as in the first four musicals is not in the ambivalence itself so much as in the facility of resolution that seemingly ignores the central conflict of the drama.

Significantly, it is only when Lubitsch moves into the contemporary world with the two straight comedies made after the first four musicals, the comedies with a distinctly Depression background, that he is able to find an aesthetically satisfying resolution for his unresolvable conflicts: the Depression itself provides a world of uncertainty that can accommodate the uncertainties of *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living* (1933). From these two films until his last two films in the forties a double ending will cap his narratives to signal differing fates for his characters on personal and social levels.

As *The Man I Killed* was an experiment for Lubitsch in serious drama that failed with the public, he returned to comedy for the rest of his career, but comedies, particularly in the late thirties and early forties, of an unusual and distinctive manner that mark them as some of the most original films produced in Hollywood. Much as his early work shifted back and forth between historical tragedy and romantic comedy and much as his comic plots followed the dramaturgical patterns of his tragedies, Lubitsch's best films of the thirties are comedies precariously balanced on the edge of tragedy.

As idiosyncratic as Lubitsch's comedy continued to be, however, he was strongly affected by changes in comedy in this period. Romantic comedy in the thirties, especially in the world of Frank Capra, became increasingly political in its concerns. I will chart the changes in Lubitsch's films in subsequent chapters and connect them directly to the rise of Frank Capra and Leo McCarey as the preeminent comedy directors of the time. Two important points should nevertheless be mentioned here as prelude to my discussion. Where romantic comedy in the past had most often operated in the isolated world of the super-rich, under the force of the Depression and a resultant change in class consciousness American comedy began to accommodate the middle classes and finally be dominated by them. When the upper classes did appear in these films, their characters were decidedly more bourgeois in attitude, while sources of wealth, usually fairly recent, were most often identified.

Second, high comedy, especially in the work of Frank Capra, lost its hermetically sealed quality and was most often played off against the background of an actual and usually contemporary political reality. Under the irresistible force of the social crisis of the Depression and the impending political catastrophe in Europe, American high comedy became more realistic in manner, more middle class in milieu, and more political in its concerns. Lubitsch was deeply affected by these changes.

It was not until *Ninotchka* (1939) and *To Be Or Not To Be* (1941) that Lubitsch himself would deal with explicitly political material, but to some degree political concerns were not in fact foreign to his films. As the royal personages of the musicals introduced a historical feel to Lubitsch comedy, they also adumbrated a political dimension, but in consequence of the figmental historical settings the politics were necessarily abstract. Beginning with *Trouble in Paradise* in 1932 there is a shift in Lubitsch's work: this is his first comedy set against a recognizable reality replete with contemporary social and political problems. Often treated by critics as the high point of Lubitsch's career, *Trouble in Paradise* will be my starting point because it combines in their fullest realization the distinctive elements of earlier Lubitsch comedy at the same time that it stakes out the expansive direction of his later, emotionally denser films.

As I look at developments in Lubitsch's career I must necessarily consider the various contexts, historical and contemporary, in which each film appeared. Historically, every individual work of art arrives in effect at the end of a tradition which it might adhere to, rework, or openly rebel against. It is distressing how frequently critical opinion on movies operates with an ignorance of artistic traditions and conventions: Lubitsch's musicals, for example, were among his most convention-bound works, but they were generally treated as innovative, while later works that present original mixtures of genres and expressive modes were regarded as just more Lubitsch, some up to the old standards, some below par.

For contemporary contexts I am interested in the sociopolitical atmosphere in which the films appeared as well as their cultural environment, which, for my purposes here, will chiefly mean other films of the period. As fiction films are necessarily collaborative in their creation, every individual who works on a film helps spin a complex web of references to other works. Because an exploration of all these various contributions to any one film would be unwieldy and perhaps ultimately self-defeating, I have limited myself here to the two most readily apparent influences on a film: the producing studio which, for the period under consideration, could have a direct effect on the look of a film; and the leading actors, who would carry with them for any audience of the time a host of references to other works.

The increasingly political nature of Lubitsch's films in the thirties is a natural development from the content of his earlier historical films at the same time that it reflects new trends in American screen comedy. In a similar fashion, Lubitsch's movement toward longer takes and a concomitant emphasis on whole spaces in his late thirties shooting style reflect a stylistic change appropriate to the thematic shift from the extreme individualism of the earlier films to a concern for the workings of a social group as a whole, *but* this change *also* echoes stylistic tendencies of Hollywood films in general in this period. In a sense, these parallel developments present a puzzle that can never fully admit of a solution in the same way that every human personality remains fundamentally an enigmatic and indivisible creation of both nature and environment. Yet, even if there is no solution, this puzzle is fascinating to contemplate for the insights it offers into both an individual artist and a period of history, for the exploration it makes possible of a major artist's growth as his vision is nourished by the unique interaction of his art with his times.

2

THE PUREST STYLE

"As for pure style I think I have done nothing better or as good as *Trouble in Paradise*."——Lubitsch

Lubitsch's praise, written in the last months of his life, for the "pure style" of *Trouble in Paradise*, should not be taken as meaning that any of his subsequent films were less accomplished stylistically. Rather, "pure style" seemed to connote to Lubitsch an overtness of style and a level of abstraction that grows less apparent in his later work. The extreme stylization through which much of the narrative of *Trouble in Paradise* is presented established this film as the culmination of Lubitsch's previous work, marrying the stylistic methods of the silent films to those of the musicals: from the silent films, both the historical tragedies and the comedies, it borrows a freewheeling method of dramatic construction and a distanced view of character; from the musicals it borrows music itself as a distancing device and also a hierarchical sense of characterization. In all these films, but most of all in *Trouble in Paradise*, style is felt as an *essential* part of the dramatic experience, as compelling in its surprises as the very storyline itself.

At the very least, the critical popularity of the phrase "the Lubitsch touch" indicates a director's voice that could be heard loud and clear above the personalities of even the most idiosyncratic actors, for Lubitsch's films up through *Trouble in Paradise* presented an obviously controlling sensibility through which everything that appeared on the screen was filtered. Shortly before making *The Love Parade*, his first sound feature, Lubitsch remarked: "The camera *should* comment, insinuate, make an epigram or a *bon mot*, as well as tell a story" (quoted in Weinberg, p. 279). In saying this Lubitsch reflected the dominant aesthetic principles of the period *for film*, but they were principles on the verge of change as they had already changed for literature.

The muting of the author's voice and a preference for "showing" over "telling" have been frequently advanced as a central facet of modern prose fiction. As Wayne Booth puts it, "Since Flaubert, many authors and critics have been convinced that 'objective' or 'impersonal' or 'dramatic' modes of narration are naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearance by the author or his reliable spokesman" (p. 8). For film, showing rather than telling was the simplest matter in the world because film recorded reality with an appearance of completeness and objectivity so startling that earliest film audiences could be terrified by a shot of a train pulling into a railway station. It was the very facility of the medium in recording reality that made much of its product suspicious as genuine art and led to critical praise for directors who clearly and obviously transmuted that basic realism. As the introduction of sound seemed to complete film's illusion of reality, film aesthetics were brought more in line with literary aesthetics of the time: an "impersonal" manner of presenting the narrative became the dominant style of the sound period. Lubitsch's films of the thirties show his own clear response to this change.

AN AUTHOR'S VOICE

Writer Samson Raphaelson, Lubitsch's most frequent collaborator on his sound films, has observed that by the late thirties his method of writing a screenplay for Lubitsch had changed substantially to the point that the dramatic construction was closer to what he used in his own playwriting. The chief difference in the screenplay structure of the earlier and later films may be found in the changing approach to scenic and dramatic continuity. The earlier Lubitsch films are distinguished by a strong sense of fragmentation that operates on three levels: in scenic structure, in overall dramatic continuity, and in the visual style, most of all in the elliptical presentation of time and space.

As a matter of scene construction, consider the following sequence from *Trouble in Paradise*, Lubitsch's first sound comedy. When a fight breaks out between thieving compatriots Lily (Miriam Hopkins) and Gaston (Herbert Marshall) over Lily's well-justified suspicions that Gaston is commencing a romance with perfume millionairess Mariette (Kay Francis), Lubitsch discreetly cuts away to Mariette talking on the phone to François (Edward Everett Horton), another suitor. On returning to Lily and Gaston, we see they are still at an impasse, but the most heated moments of the battle have passed. The cutaway at this point is as odd as it is unexpected because the plot offers no internal logic for it. In fact, it could even be said to work against dramatic logic by unnecessarily dividing one coherent scene into two separate scenes. No dramatic action is offered to justify the interruption, and the actual information contained in the disrupting scene—Mariette telling François she will not be able to see him next week—is an irrelevant detail for the film's narrative, of minimal interest, and never referred to again.

The use of cutaways motivated more by thematic than dramatic connections is as common in silent films as it would become rare in the thirties.* If the cutaway in *Trouble in Paradise* works somewhat against the drama of the fight between Lily and Gaston, its intrusion can nonetheless be justified thematically as Mariette is seen here literally at the center of the argument, and her rejection of François signals her growing involvement with Gaston. She intrudes on the drama of the fight much as she intrudes on the stability of the Gaston–Lily relationship. Her sudden appearance in the middle of the

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*Here are two examples from well-known silent directors whose styles differ in most other respects. In the opening sequences of *The Mother and the Law* (1915–19) D. W. Griffith repeatedly cuts to a shot of factory boss Jenkins alone in his office; there is no action in the shots, and they have no immediate effect on narrative events. Rather, the shots serve to remind the viewer of the power this lone man tyranically exercises over his workers.

While generally striving for a more fluid, seamless style than Griffith's, F. W. Murnau in *Sunrise* (1927) was not at all averse to breaking in two the extended sequence of the country couple's trip to the big city with an uneventful shot of the city woman still in the country. As in the Griffith example, the cutaway advances no new narrative or dramatic information, but rather serves the thematic purpose of reminding the audience of the potential evil still hovering over the recently reconciled innocents from the country.

argument also serves by contrast to establish her ignorance of what is taking place around her: while Gaston and Lily are on edge, she appears calm, cheerful, and confident of herself. By avoiding the most unpleasant moments of the battle between Lily and Gaston, the cutaway maintains the surface lightness of tone that critics always found in Lubitsch, yet it does so without glossing over the meaning of the fight.

In denying a straightforward dramatic development to the fight, Lubitsch in effect reasserts himself and creates a distance on the characters which makes it dramatically impossible to side with any one of them entirely. Since Lily's complaints to Gaston are in fact justified, an uninterrupted scene at this point would naturally grant her sympathy as the most vulnerable party. But the cutaway reveals other vulnerabilities and creates in the process more of a balance among the three lovers: Mariette's sense of self-confidence, which could be disastrously shattered by Lily's claims on Gaston, and Gaston's growing dependence on Mariette, which is the source of her confidence. By inserting Mariette into the middle of this scene, Lubitsch makes his own voice heard and, for all the resultant emotional complexity, unambiguously directs audience response.

In overall dramatic continuity a principle of interruption is central to *Trouble in Paradise.* From its very beginning the film seems to chart a number of diverging courses: a brief scene with a singing garbarge-collector/gondolier leads inexplicably into a shadowy robbery which in turn leads into a dinner-cum-seduction whose progress is interrupted by developing reports of the robbery, all of this finally capped by a return to the garbage-collector/gondolier still singing the same song as he boats along the canals of Venice. These interruptions are in large part responsible for the brilliant surface of the film that critics have repeatedly remarked upon, as the narrative moves through a flow of small but continuous changes that create a delight in the very uncertainty of the story's direction.

The pattern of interruption is so clearly established in the opening scenes of the film, that the film's greatest digression and most abrupt change of direction, the unexpected advertisement for Colet perfumes that finally sets the narrative on its main track, does not have the force of a break in style, even though it introduces both a new setting and a new set of characters. Rather, as there is a continuity of style, the strong sense of the author's presence felt through all these little interruptions establishes a continuity between apparently distinct narratives. The shift to Paris and a new set of characters take place not because of any dramatic logic that points to an inevitable development from one event to the next, but simply because the author wills it.

Finally, the visual style of the film itself complements the fragmenting style of the scene construction and dramatic continuity. In their first meeting together, Gaston suspects Lily of lifting his wallet and wants to search her for it. Lubitsch shoots Gaston's preparations for the search as follows: from a shot of Gaston and Lily at their dinner table Lubitsch cuts directly to a shot of a door which Gaston approaches and locks, and from this shot directly to a shot of a window over which drapes are drawn shut. By eliminating both the space and time that Gaston would have to cover to go from table to door to window Lubitsch typically focuses viewer attention on the actions in themselves with no concern for the *process* behind the actions. Furthermore, in his selective presentation he provides one definite way of viewing the action: a resultant overly dramatic mood underscored by the overly dramatic background music to lend the scene a tone of mock melodrama and suggest something of a mock rape in Gaston's body search of Lily. As this fragmenting style never subordinates itself to an action, the way of looking at an event becomes primary in our dramatic experience of the scene, while the event itself becomes secondary.

This constant pattern of interruption, then, repeatedly cuts into the fabric of realistic illusionism that would become the dominant style for film in the thirties. But if sound successfully heightened the realism of film as Andre Bazin has claimed, it paradoxically also introduced to film one of the most artificial of theatrical genres, the musical. While the musicals enabled Lubitsch to fuse the two generic strands of his career by placing the romantic comedies in a quasi-historical milieu, his almost relentless insistence on staying with this genre from 1929 to 1932 may also be seen as an attempt at solving a stylistic problem introduced by sound inasmuch as the very artificiality of the genre could itself justify his very stylized filmmaking. If sound did inevitably bring films closer to a naturalistic representation of reality, then Lubitsch seems to have resisted on every key issue, at least at first, the fullest implications of sound.

Sound film granted a performer greater autonomy over his performance by finally granting him his own voice, which to some degree would not only set limits on his characterization, but also determine something of the film's pacing. If, for example, Gary Cooper were to star in a light romantic comedy, the pacing would inevitably be slower than if William Powell were to play the same part. It has often been noted that Lubitsch rigorously controlled performances by himself acting out parts for his actors. This bit of backstage gossip is of course finally extrinsic to our experience of the films themselves, but I think it does point to a kind of artificiality in the performing style of these films in which the actors are made to conform to a manner of speaking that is partly determined by the style of the dialogue.

An individual actor will leave his distinctive mark on the film naturally, yet a Gary Cooper or a James Stewart cast in a Lubitsch film ends up sounding more like other Lubitsch characters than like other Cooper or Stewart characters because there is a verbal consistency in Lubitsch's films, regardless of the screenwriter, that itself helps determine how the lines will be read.* For example, Lubitsch and his screenwriters frequently create a strong rhythmic effect in the dialogue by repeating verbal or syntactic structures from line to line. Here are some examples of this rhythmic repetition from different points in Lubitsch's career and from different screenwriters. In *Design for Living* (1933), Tom explains his hurt feelings over Gilda's romance with George—

TOM: George betrayed me for you. Without wishing to flatter you, I understood that. I can still understand it, But you betrayed me for George—an incredible choice!

In *Ninotchka* Leon tries to persuade Ninotchka of the universal power of love in the following fashion—

LEON: Ninotchka, why do doves bill and coo? Why do snails, the coldest of all creatures, circle interminably around each other? Why do moths fly hundreds of miles to find their mates? Why do flowers slowly open their petals?

In *To Be or Not To Be* (1941) actress Maria Tura explains to Gestapo bigwig Professor Siletsky why she is not certain she would like to become a spy:

MARIA: You know, professor, if you die in the theater, afterwards you get up and take a bow. But if you die in real life—afterwards, you're just dead.

In *Heaven Can Wait* Henry tries to explain the virtues of his new love to his mother, who is afraid that the girl might be another in a long line of musical comedy chorines:

HENRY: No, this time it's entirely different music. It's not hootchy-kootchy. It's not the can-can. It's like a waltz by Strauss, like a minuet by Mozart.

Finally, in *Cluny Brown* (1946) Professor Adam Belinski berates the stuffy Hilary Ames for not taking a greater interest in Belinski's problems:

ADAM: You don't know me and already you're not interested in me. Why don't you ask me why I want to see Professor Leigh? All you're thinking about is the Honorable Betty Cream! Why don't you ask me about my landlady? Is she human or does she want the rent? Do you know or do you care? No!

The overt artificiality of the language created by an insistently repetitive phraseology might have been necessary for the musicals in that it helped bridge the inevitable gap between the prosaic passages of straight dialogue and the more poetic atmosphere of the song numbers. In the straight comedies, however, the language creates an artificial atmosphere not for the sake of song numbers, but for the intrusion of an ever-commenting author's voice.

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* I do not wish to minimize here the brilliant contributions made by individual screenwriters to Lubitsch's films, especially as Lubitsch himself was always generous in praising the work of his collaborators. In arguing for a verbal consistency from film to film, however, I want to emphasize two points. First of all, although he rarely took screen credit, Lubitsch was always the co-author of his screenplays. Second, as the writers knew they were writing for Lubitsch, they produced, whether by instinct or consciously, a dialogue style that is different from their work for other directors or, in the case of the screenwriters who were also playwrights, different from the style of their own plays.

The muting of Lubitsch's voice in the later films finds a commensurate shift in the function of this poetic language. The rhythmic and frequently metaphorical speech often employed by *all* the characters in the earlier films becomes increasingly restricted in the later films to one or two characters, until *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown*, where it is limited almost exclusively to the male leads. Where the rhythmic dialogue of the earlier films defines an entire milieu, in the later films it simply defines an individual character.

Stylistic decisions generally appropriate for the musicals, then, had a direct influence on the straight comedies that followed. Unlike the comedies of the twenties, the straight sound comedies followed the method of the musicals in establishing a hierarchy of plot and subplot that keyed a comparable hierarchy in characterization to draw the secondary characters in broader, parodistic strokes. In *Trouble in Paradise*, for example, main plot and subplot unfold, in a formalist manner typical of the film's style, as two intersecting triangles, with each triangle presenting a different level of characterization. In the main plot, master crook Gaston Monescu enters into a professional relationship with Lily, herself a crook of nearly equal talents. Having stolen the very expensive handbag of perfume heiress Mariette Colet, Gaston then returns it to her for a generous reward and proves so attractive to her at their meeting that she hires him as her private secretary. When Lily is taken on as stenographer in the household, secretly to help Gaston rob Mariette, she soon begins to suspect, with good reason, that Gaston's interest in Mariette is in more than money. With Gaston at the apex of this triangle, the subplot places Mariette between two comically dull and pompously ineffectual characters, François and the Major (Charlie Ruggles), both of whom seem to belong to a different world.

Virtually any conventional Hollywood narrative structured around leads, second leads, and character performers will at the least imply a hierarchy of characterization, but within that hierarchy important distinctions are to be made in the way the minor characters are drawn. They might be seen as similar in type to the leads, but simply less interesting, and to some degree this is the direction Lubitsch will move in with his later films. Or, and this is the case with *Trouble in Paradise* and the films immediately following it, they may be seen as flat characters with no possibility for development, near grotesques who serve to set off the greater subtlety and suppleness of the leads.

Lubitsch's character division in these comedies grows out of the second-couple formula that is commonplace in operettas and musicals. He applied it in its most conventional manner in *The Love Parade*, his first musical, where the love of the major characters was endowed with greater weight by being played off the sprightlier combat of the comic couple.* By the time of *Trouble in Paradise* he had reworked the convention somewhat along lines he would follow until the late thirties: where the secondary characters in *The Love Parade* are lightly comic, François and the Major in *Trouble in Paradise* are heavy, dull, humorless and, importantly, unaware. What the minor characters lack in self-awareness, the major characters have in great abundance, so much so they are frequently ironic about themselves and to each other. The traditional comic character of the *eiron*, the ironist, is generally defined as a dissembler, a character who knows more than he says. By their very self-awareness, then, Lubitsch's ironists repeatedly point to an area of feeling beyond what we see on the surface.

The light grace of ironic behavior when contrasted with the sobriety of François and the Major becomes the real indicator of seriousness in this film. Irony for Lubitsch at this point in his career is an unruffled and unflappable façade which signals a depth of feeling, not an absence. As central as irony is to Lubitsch's vision, his approaches to irony will undergo changes in the later films that ultimately point to a partial reversal of attitudes. For the moment I merely want to note that this division of characters along the lines of ironic expression sets Lubitsch somewhat outside the mainstream of American comedy at the time, which was moving toward a more homogeneous approach to character.

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* Lubitsch's rigid insistence on following this conventional character division in his musicals was particularly harmful to *One Hour With You*, his musical remake of *The Marriage Circle*. As the foppish character played by Charlie Ruggles can offer no serious threat to the Maurice Chevalier–Jeanette MacDonald marriage, the delicate *quid pro quo* with which the earlier film ended is unbalanced.

INDIVIDUALISM TRIUMPHANT

Much as the fragmentation in scene construction, dramatic continuity, and visual style make Lubitsch's voice the key element of coherence, the general sense of fragmentation in his films reinforces the intensely individualistic vision I briefly discussed in the preceding chapter. In all the films up through *Design for Living* Lubitsch's style repeatedly shifts emphasis from context to individual, effectively allowing the presence of the individual to dominate his or her spatial and—ultimately—social context. Andrew Bergman has noted that the early thirties produced "an anarchic stream" of film comedy that "most related to the bitterness and despair in America" at the time (p. 30). The individualist orientation of Lubitsch's fragmenting style found its fullest expression in *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living* because these are his most fully anarchic works, rejecting the dominant social order for a triumphant celebration of the individual personality *against* an overly restrictive and repressive society.

Yet much as Lubitsch's films of this period continue his focus on the individual, they also project his most exactly defined vision of society: *Trouble in Paradise* might be one of Lubitsch's most stylized films, yet it also presents the first time in his American period that he deals with a recognizable contemporary reality. In the process, the conflict between individual desire and social command that is at the heart of his Ruritanian musicals was made more precise and less abstracted, which in turn made his social attitudes less palatable to audiences at the time. The exact nature of these attitudes may be seen most clearly with Lubitsch's brief contribution to the omnibus film *If I Had a Million* (1932) because "The Clerk" represents one of the few Lubitsch sound films that does not take the form of a romantic comedy and is purely social in its concerns. Furthermore, the surrounding episodes by the far greater conventionality of their attitudes provide a striking contrast to the Lubitsch section.

The frame story of *If I Had a Million* tells of a multimillionaire (Richard Bennett) who, thinking he is about to die, attempts to give away his entire fortune in million-dollar gifts before any of his greedy relatives can inherit it. Each episode had separate screenwriters and directors, but the point of view in each centers on one of two opposing extremes: either money can buy everything, or money can't buy everything. It is perhaps indicative of strongly puritanical notions of money in American culture that two such apparently contradictory attitudes could exist within one film. Lubitsch's episode, "The Clerk," stands apart from the rest of the film in its attitudes, both in being very specific about what money can buy and in seeing its narrative events in explicitly social terms.

The episodes that have the greatest potential for social and political analysis, "The China Shop" and "Old Ladies Home," are worked out in purely personal terms, with the characters in each revenging themselves not so much on an unfair social order as on specific individuals who administer that order but are not seen as representing any particular class. In their refusal to recognize a larger social scheme in which the enemies of the protagonist operate, these two sequences present a debased individualism markedly different from Lubitsch's individualistic vision which takes full note of the social struggle his characters engage in. Money makes a sweet revenge possible for the characters of "The China Shop" and "Old Ladies Home," but it is a revenge solely directed against other individuals. While, as I have suggested, the fragmentation of Lubitsch's style places a strong emphasis on the individual, the very fragmentation in "The Clerk" also serves to define a rigidly hierarchical social order. Accordingly, Lubitsch's section is the only one that sees the events of its narrative both for what they mean to the individual and for what they say about the dominant social order.

"The Clerk" is unlike any other section not only in its social vision, but in its length and style: almost completely wordless, it is also the shortest episode, only 2 minutes and 18 seconds and just twelve shots long, really more a blackout sketch than the short-story type narratives that make up the rest of the film. In one regard "The Clerk" operates as much as a send-up of the rest of the film as the clerk's raspberry at the end of the episode is a send-up of the social structure, because the very simplicity of the episode exposes the dramatic weakness of the central idea: a clerk receives a check for a million dollars, goes to his boss, and gives him a raspberry—end of story. What more need be said? By comparison the other episodes must seem prolix.

As "The Clerk" is more precise in its narrative, it is more complex in its social analysis. The difference can be seen most clearly by a comparison to "The China Shop," because its story neatly parallels that of "The Clerk." Both episodes focus on men who are clearly oppressed by their jobs and, in receiving their million dollars, are able to revenge themselves on their oppressors. "The China Shop" provides exhaustively specific details of Henry Peabody's (Charlie Ruggles) woes: a good accountant who has been promoted to salesclerk, a job at which he is not so good, he continually receives a lower paycheck than he did as an accountant because he inadvertently keeps breaking merchandise, the cost of which is deducted from his salary. Furthermore, he is attacked at home by a tyranizing wife who will not let him keep his pet rabbit, the latter misery suggesting sexual starvation as well.

By contrast we learn next to nothing about Phineas V. Lambert (Charles Laughton) in "The Clerk" because he appears a social archetype, defined solely through image and gesture. The row upon row of desks that recall King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928) suggests the stultifying enforced orderliness of the man's life, but the shot in no way allows for a sense of his individual response to it.* The gestures he makes in receipt of the letter containing the million dollar check—first brushing it aside with one continuous hand movement as he finishes making an entry in his account book, then officiously opening it and flattening out the letter—suggest an action being repeated for the umpteenth time as if he were almost a machine that responds even to a new event in the only way it has been programmed to respond. This character, then, is initially defined not so much as an individual but as the ultimate clerk.

The rest of the episode after the receipt of the check shows him making his way to the President's office, first moving up a flight of stairs, then, in a series of four shots, through four different doors, each door taking him up one level in the hierarchy: "Administrative Offices," "Secretary to the President," "The Private Secretary to the President" and, finally, "Mr. Brown, President." The rigidity of the social structure is felt in the rigidity of the shooting style as straight cuts cause one door to be replaced directly with another, with each door becoming more and more impenetrable as the construction material shifts from opaque glass to light wood to dark wood to heavy inlaid paneling. When the President Mr. Brown is finally seen, the image is appropriately archetypal so that the confrontation, at first blush at least, is not seen as one between two individuals: in a long shot Mr. Brown sits behind a massive and ornate desk reading through some business papers, the distance of the shot obscuring his features but calling attention to the heavy mise-en-scène which expresses a type of fortified authority.

By cutting directly from door to door to door Lubitsch's shooting style seems to lay bare the rigid social structure in which the clerk occupies the bottom rung. But, paradoxically, the fragmented quality of the style seems to explode that structure by creating a visual rhythm that makes each successive door inevitable: as rigid as the social structure may be, the clerk's progress is unstoppable. As the film establishes a hierarchy for the sake of tearing it down, it trades on archetypes for the sake of destroying them. The raspberry that the clerk gives his boss at the end is a surprise for the meek and oppressed *type* that had been created at the beginning of the sequence, but it is a surprise only because we have known the clerk as no more than a type. Money in "The Clerk" does not so much buy happiness as it does in a number of other episodes: rather, it frees the individual from ordinary social constraints that come either from his position in the conventional hierarchy which defines his public character or from the rules of polite behavior which dictate that his actual character may not be shown. The surprise ending signals an anarchic individualism rudely breaking through the rigidity of the mise-en-scène and the performing style.

There are major changes in Lubitsch's style in the late thirties that bring his films more into conformity with the dominant naturalistic

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* Lubitsch's admiration for the Vidor film has been documented in the following anecdote by Irving Shapiro: "Lubitsch once sat through King Vidor's 'The Crowd' with this writer and said, 'Americans won't understand the film. Europeans won't understand the film. Only Europeans who have lived in America will understand it' " (p. 87).

style of the period. While the changes are gradually assumed, they are finally so extreme that Lubitsch's last film placed alongside "The Clerk" might well look like the work of a different artist. How different this later style is and how much it reflects a transformation in Lubitsch's vision may be seen most clearly by considering the shooting style of two other directors. Suppose Jean Renoir and Alfred Hitchcock had been invited to the same party, and both happened to arrive with cameras in hand. Where Renoir might use a predominance of long shots and large groups of people to convey a sense of the party in its entirety, Hitchcock would focus on isolated details to give a sudden flash of high drama underlying a calmer surface. This is most of all a difference between a camera which does not pretend to see everything and an actively inquiring camera for which there are no secrets. Put most simply, Lubitsch begins close to Hitchcock, but ends close to Renoir.

Complementing this change in visual style, the metaphorical quality I noted in Lubitsch's films is transformed in the late thirties and forties. In the later films, the metaphors become grander and more generalized so that the force of specificity they have in the earlier films, the sense of an author making a strong point about a character or event, is weakened. In the later works, the metaphors quietly pervade the entire film, more tightly woven into the fabric of the narrative and less of a decorative flounce stitched on by an unexpected positioning of the camera: clothing in *Ninotchka*, the shop in *The Shop Around the Corner*, theater in *To Be or Not to Be*, and the mansion in *Heaven Can Wait*. As the metaphorical force of these films diminishes, the ironic distance on characters and events is shortened and, in a number of films, the value of ironic expression is itself questioned.

If the style of Lubitsch's later films shifts their interests to something larger than the individual character, the fragmenting quality of his earlier films keeps the focus primarily on the individual at the same time that it allows for an understanding of the social order. To some degree Phineas Lambert's raspberry might be seen as emblematic of the tone of the two features made on either side of "The Clerk," *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living*. Oddly, while Lubitsch was creating the fantasy societies of the Ruritanian musicals, he accepted, albeit with some disquietude, the inevitable power of the social order to assert itself. But as he moved for the first time into contemporary social reality in these two features and one short, he also moved to his most openly critical attacks on the social order. Later Lubitsch films certainly have their satirical moments, but none are so thoroughly rejecting of dominant values as *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living*.

3

THROUGH A DEPRESSION LIGHTLY

TROUBLE IN PARADISE AND *DESIGN FOR LIVING*

While Hollywood managed to reap great profits in 1929 because of the introduction of sound, major and minor studios, as has been well-documented by Andrew Bergman, had already begun to feel the effects of the Depression in 1930. By 1932, the economic situation in the movie industry had reached crisis proportions: Lubitsch's home studio, Paramount, one of the worst hit because of extensive theatrical holdings, had to go into receivership and massive reorganization. Lubitsch was sufficiently involved in studio politics at Paramount that one result of the constant management shuffling at that studio in the early thirties was his appointment as production chief in 1934. Lubitsch's necessary awareness of the changes in an industry for which money was once so abundant it almost did not matter is an important point because the sudden financial uncertainty of the movie business was, I believe, at least in part responsible for the marked change in perspective in his films of this period.

For all the surface sheen and stylistic artificialities that *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living* borrow from the musicals that precede

them, they are more directly related to a contemporary sociopolitical reality than any previous Lubitsch film, and that relationship is far more essential to the drama of the films than the passing satirical references to advertising, Bolsheviks, wage cuts, approaching prosperity, and disarmament conferences. For the first time in his American films, Lubitsch had subjected his characters to economic realities a contemporary audience could understand and identify with: they *have* to work for a living. And in the first half of *Design for Living* characters can display as much hunger for food as they can for sex; they have real physical wants that are no longer satisfied as a matter of course, and money has become more of a necessity than a sign of luxury.

Nothing in the Noel Coward play on which Lubitsch's *Design for Living* is based indicates the temporal specificity of the film. And while the play had been drastically rewritten for the screen, the exact location in the Depression and the deliberate Americanization of the characters should be considered, for reasons I will discuss later in this chapter, the two most significant changes from the original. What concerns me most here is the distinctively Depression sense of uncertainty that surfaces in both *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living*, first as economic uncertainty, which then transforms itself into an emotional uncertainty. It may be said that a real instability pervades romantic pairings in Lubitsch in general to the extent that Lubitsch's narratives so frequently center on triangles. But *Design for Living* is unique in all Lubitsch in that it moves through a marriage to reestablish a triangle at the end, while his past films generally moved through a triangle to establish or reestablish a stable marriage at the end. In *Design for Living*, however, it is the instability of a ménage à trois that becomes the norm. The resolution of the triangle in *Trouble in Paradise* fits more easily into the typical Lubitsch pattern, yet it may be related to the instability in *Design for Living* as well. It is finally the force of society and not the moral and emotional pressure of wife-figure Lily which prevents the affair between Gaston and would-be-lover Mariette from taking place. The emotions that Mariette has aroused in Gaston are not so much exorcised at the end as covered over.

The endings of both films strikingly parallel one another, each using similar means to convey a marked sense of uncertainty about the future: both present their lead characters in darkened cabs on the first leg of a journey to other countries and to futures that represent attempts to recapture a possibly lost past. The darkness of both scenes is important not merely because it partly undercuts the gaiety of the characters, but also because it creates a visual indefiniteness, a sense of movement in a void. In one way these endings are more like beginnings, which might be true of romantic comedy in general because the beginning of a new life is inevitably promised. But in having the new life an attempt to recall a past life, Lubitsch immediately throws these futures into doubt: the future in *Trouble in Paradise* is a continued life of thievery that must always keeps its characters on guard about their position in society, while the future in *Design for Living* is a return to a ménage à trois that can only work if three very sexual characters are able to deny sex.

In some respects the changes here from the earlier films are a matter of emphasis, but precisely how far-reaching this emphasis can be, and how much it finally changes the content of Lubitsch's films, may be seen by comparing the plot lines and characters of *The Smiling Lieutenant* and *Trouble in Paradise.* Both films are plotted around a triangle with a man caught at the apex between a working-class woman and an aristocrat, but the resolutions of the plots are strikingly different: in *The Smiling Lieutenant* the lieutenant (Maurice Chevalier), seemingly against any internal logic of plot or character development, moves into the upper classes by learning to love his royal bride, while the hard-working crook in *Trouble in Paradise* finally deserts his upper-class love to go off on a new adventure with his elegantly proletarian coworker.

There are furthermore striking differences in the characterization of the women on both upper and lower levels in the way class is used to reflect character. Princess Anna (Miriam Hopkins) in *The Smiling Lieutenant* is a poor-little-rich-girl cliché, charmingly realized, but little more, while Mariette's wealth in *Trouble in Paradise* is both a source of advantages for her in that it allows her a self-indulgent sensuality at the same time that this sensuality will mark her as vulnerable. Class in *The Smiling Lieutenant* denotes wealth, which is then not considered particularly important, merely an incidental of class, while wealth in *Trouble in Paradise* not only denotes class but is central to any understanding of character.

The working women in the two films differ in similar fashion. Franzi (Claudette Colbert), who is a violinist in an all-women orchestra in *The Smiling Lieutenant*, has a job which signals an independence and resourcefulness that is part of the character's attraction, but otherwise her work itself has little importance either for the character or for the audience. Because she is finally *not* defined by her work or her class, she can state so clearly in the "Spruce Up Your Lingerie" number that she and Princess Anna are really sisters under the silks. By contrast, Lily in *Trouble in Paradise* is largely defined by the nature of her work, and the mocking irony in Miriam Hopkins' delivery of the confession to her lady employer and possible rival that she has to work hard to support her poor orphaned brother reveals as well as it conceals a truth: she *does* have to work hard alongside Gaston for their mutual support. If *The Smiling Lieutenant* moves uncomfortably toward a resolution that all women are the same to men, *Trouble in Paradise* makes a strongly pronounced distinction in character that is, importantly, defined principally in economic terms. By insisting on economics as a definition of character, Lubitsch has moved here beyond the abstracting vision of society of his earlier films and staked out the direction his later films will follow.

However much dramatic problems confronting Lubitsch's characters in the past were grounded in social conflict, the society itself was made distant either through the abstraction of fantasy or through history. The new economic definition placed on characters in "The Clerk," *Trouble in Paradise*, and *Design for Living* points to a crucial difference in the development of his oeuvre. Lubitsch's irony applied to historical and Ruritanian rulers is one thing, since history and fantasy provide sufficient distance to blunt the sting. Applied in a more contemporary context, as in these films, the humor at the very least becomes more biting, and perhaps something more than that.

As the terrible reality of the Depression forced itself, however discreetly, into his work, Lubitsch's vision grew emotionally richer, darker, and less facile in its cynicism.

Both *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living* share a structural similarity in the form of a transition from prologue to story proper by means of an advertisement that is treated satirically to establish the representatives of the business world in both films as objects of ridicule. Anti-business themes became increasingly strong in films of the thirties, much as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's attacks on business became fiercer and fiercer in this period. By the end of the decade Frank Capra's social comedies are openly identifying big businessmen as native fascists. Although sometimes referred to as a Populist, Capra was not in fact against business per se and could even promote a banker as the hero of his 1932 film, *American Madness*. To the extent that Capra was praising a businessman in 1932 while Lubitsch was scathingly attacking the whole world of business, Lubitsch was somewhat ahead of his time, but Capra's anti-business attitude in his later films was quite different from Lubitsch's and more in the mainstream of American thought.

If Capra could praise a businessman in the early thirties, it was because his target in the late thirties was, like Roosevelt's, primarily big business. Lubitsch's attack on business is more generalized, an attack on the activity itself as well as the people who engage in it. This, however, is further complicated by the fact that Lubitsch's attitude toward the rich is at the least ambiguous and certainly more positive than Capra's. A direct comparison of the two Lubitsch films with Capra's first social comedy will clarify this difference.

It Happened One Night (1934) centers on a class conflict that, as Andrew Bergman has noted, isn't much of a conflict at all. The film finally insists that all people are fundamentally alike, and only through an overcoming of the disadvantages of class can the democratic spirit prevail. Capra's poor-little-rich-girl in this film is almost diametrically opposed to those of Lubitsch in *The Smiling Lieutenant* and *Trouble in Paradise* in that she is seen as poor for having had too much freedom her whole life: having been able to have everything, she knows the value of nothing and is bound to make the wrong

choice in picking her mate. The lower-class partner in earlier Lubitsch must inevitably rise to the upper class because early Lubitsch comedy from the teens on is based on a principle of ascent, but for Capra the middle classes have a monopoly on virtue: if the spoiled heiress (played by Claudette Colbert) is ever to achieve any genuine humanity she must in her on-the-road travels with man-of-the-people Clark Gable get over her upbringing and come down to Gable's level. Of course in this class descent she gets to keep her money as well, but this apparent contradiction is really a familiar strain in American movies that constantly repudiates the value of money in molding character at the same time that money can be a prime motivating force for action.

The limited popularity Lubitsch's films found with a broad American audience possibly derives from their constant denial of the kind of overt democratic ideal found in the Capra films. No matter how much his characters may be without money, as the characters of both *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living* are at some point in their careers, they never for a moment lose their aristocratic manners. And the manners themselves are never seen as a mark of pretentiousness as they would be for Capra. Rather, they become the clearest indication of the character's social maturity and self-awareness. Capra's only sense of manners is as phoney airs that contrast with what he considers more authentic behavior. In *It Happened One Night* the spoiled heiress makes an important step toward "real life" when her traveling companion teaches her how to dunk doughnuts in her morning coffee.

This bit of business offers a fine comparison to Lubitsch since dunking is a familiar gag in Lubitsch's film as least as far back as *Die Augen der Mummi Ma* in 1918, and a repeated dunking routine in *Trouble in Paradise* effectively points out differences between Capra's puritanical and Lubitsch's ironical views of social behavior. Both upper-class Mme Colet and lower-class Lily furtively dunk when their breakfast companion is not looking, and the two characters are effectively united across class lines in this one regard as much by their secretiveness as by the act of dunking itself. Neither character is more or less authentic, although of different classes, because manners for

Lubitsch extend to every class. What most fascinates Lubitsch about proper social behavior, and what probably accounts for his fondness for this dunking routine, is the very arbitrariness of its forms, which enables him both to endorse certain forms of behavior at the same time that he remains ironic about them. Capra plays on a more distinctively American notion of a natural man who can only find his truest self by reacting against the arbitrary rules and roles dictated by his society.

To the extent that Lubitsch has little feeling for this kind of primary natural existence, but rather sees rules and role-playing on every level of society, he always remained something of an outsider in America. Nevertheless, his direct confrontation with American values and culture from *Trouble in Paradise* on accounts in part for the growing richness and complexity of his films. It also marks a change in his treatment of American actors: where he presented Monte Blue in the silent comedies as a clumsy galumph, not fully up to the demands of the high comedy world he found himself acting in, in his sound comedies he becomes more attuned to such distinctively American types as Gary Cooper and James Stewart.

Although *Design for Living* is set in Europe for most of its length, its four leading characters are all American, and if implications of perversion from the play have been lost in the film, that is in part because the film trades on familiar notions of American innocents abroad. But definite—and definitely negative—American values are also invoked in the figure of Max Plunkett (Edward Everett Horton), who is importing the American world of commerce into European culture, and possibly debasing it as well, through American advertising techniques. The casting of Englishman Herbert Marshall in *Trouble in Paradise* marks Gaston as vaguely European, that is, almost Continental, but Lily tells Gaston that when she first met him she thought he was an American, which pleases him, as well it might, for he uses the catchphrases of American business in his speech. For all its European setting and nominally European characters, *Trouble in Paradise* suggests the American business world. In his first two films to deal with a contemporary reality, then, Lubitsch defines that reality as the world of American commerce. In both films, as in "The Clerk" which came between them, the immediate response to this dominant social order is to give it a raspberry.

There are important differences in approach between the two films that signal, as the Depression went into its worst year in 1933, a mood in *Design for Living* that is both darker and, paradoxically, giddier, as if the lead characters and Lubitsch along with them were gaily dancing on the edge of an abyss. As the protagonists in *Trouble in Paradise* operate from *within* the dominant social order, seeing themselves as superior businessmen let loose in a free capitalist environment, their final action mixes rebellion with the acceptance of an inevitable and powerful social order. As the protagonists in *Design for Living* are always outsiders, their final action is more thoroughly rejecting of the dominant society. Similarly, as *Trouble in Paradise* is the more overtly socioeconomic in its concerns, *Design for Living* is the more personal. *Design for Living* is more explicitly focused on sex, *Trouble in Paradise* on money, although the two are finally made to connect in both films.

Both films posit an opposition between stability and uncertainty that might grow out of their Depression atmosphere, but they resolve the conflict in different ways. Where the uncertainty of the resolutions in the musical was an aesthetic flaw, here the uncertainty is integrated into the main flow of each film as a darker undercurrent at the end that causes the gaiety of the narrative to ebb. Oddly, where the situation in *Design for Living* is more desperate, the ending is more positive in spirit and points to a direction the later films will take. The triumph of the ménage à trois over their rich opponent, Max Plunkett, is unequivocal, while the triumph of Lily and Gaston over Mariette is in part counteracted by Lubitsch's camera lingering sympathetically on Mariette after the departure of the two thieves. Where Lily and Gaston finally accede in their departure to the power of the social order, Tom, Gilda, and George simply by virtue of their number posit in effect a new social order they are struggling to maintain. The last scene of the film might suggest that the struggle is finally hopeless, but part of the exhilaration of the ending has to do with the characters' refusal to submit to a dominant social order as earlier Lubitsch characters had always done without question.

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Trouble in Paradise has become the most thoroughly analyzed and most praised of Lubitsch's films. It has been compared to Restoration comedy and variously lauded as "a nearly perfect film," "as close to perfection as anything I have ever seen in the movies," "the most polished comedy of manners in American film," "a perfect blending of content and form," and finally, and most peculiarly, "a triumphant immorality play." At the time of its release, however, even the most laudatory critics of *Trouble in Paradise* saw little of thematic importance in it, preferring to praise it for its formal qualities. Alexander Bakshy in *The Nation* wrote "The story, it goes without saying, is a trivial anecdote" (p. 576), while Dwight Macdonald made a similarly casual dismissal of ". . . the narrative. (Which, by the way, is banal—and quite unimportant)" (p. 171). The passage of time has produced a general reassessment of the film, with most critics now seeing it as firmly rooted in the Depression and a not too covert social criticism underlying much of the comedy. Much as this is Lubitsch's most analyzed film, it also seems to me his most misunderstood, particularly in the realm of its social attitudes. Part of the problem with these analyses is simply the impressionistic approach that dominates so much film criticism, but another part is the inability or refusal of critics to pay attention to the contexts of the film: that provided by the Lubitsch films which surround it and that provided by the other films of the period as well as its generic traditions. There *is* social criticism in *Trouble in Paradise*, but too much of Lubitsch's vision has been distorted to make it fit attitudes imposed on the film.

Since *Trouble in Paradise* does operate in a more specified social context than any of the earlier films, I would first of all like to look at how setting operates here in comparison to the earlier Lubitsch films. Earlier Lubitsch films are set in European capitals, and all, *Trouble in Paradise* included, are studio-bound, so that the impact of the setting is generally more metaphorical than actual. That is, there always seems more concern for what the setting might mean than for its physical reality. In the earlier films, the foreign city, most often Paris, signified a liberation and sophistication that enabled supposedly European characters whom casting made American to act in a manner American audiences of the time might consider inappropriate. *Trouble in Paradise* is set in two cities: a prologue in Venice, the main body of the narrative in Paris, with the movement from one city to the other suggesting a shift in the film's tone. Richard Koszarski looks for the differences in the meanings that familiar associations of the cities may evoke: "Venice, known since the Renaissance not only as a great center of business and trade, but also as the world's hub of espionage and treachery. . . . Paris, capital not of finance, but of romance" (p. 47). The problem with this interpretation is that it ignores specific evidence of the film which presents Paris as more the land of business than Venice: Paris is after all introduced through a radio commercial, and much of the activity the characters engage in in Paris has to do with the workings of the Colet business empire.

It is Venice here, initially at least, that seems to take the place of Paris in the musicals: a foreign locale more romantic than any American city—canals, gondolas, tenor gondoliers singing love songs—where American characters may behave in ways denied them at home. But *how* Venice is first revealed actually suggests something quite different and, as often for a director with such a strong sense of style, the *how* is the key to understanding the *what*. The film's opening, one of its most frequently discussed scenes, has generally been regarded as presenting a conflict between appearance and reality, although there appears to be some uncertainty about what the reality itself is. As much as there is a conflict here, or at least a modification of expectations, the ambiguity is set up by an opening shot which denies specificity of locale: a simple long shot of a back porch and door, with a garbage pail and a dog trying to get at the garbage, the added detail of the dog lending an archetypal quality to the shot to suggest this setting could be anywhere where they have garbage pails and dogs. A garbage collector enters the image, adding some specificity by his dress, but the place remains unidentified. It is not until he picks up the pail and carries it to his gondola parked in the canal, the camera slowly opening up space and revealing the setting through a pan, that it is made clear the location is Venice.

We have been set up for a startling surprise here as we are so frequently in earlier Lubitsch films, but it is important for the direction taken by the later films that the surprise itself is not deflating. The most familiar kind of reversal in Lubitsch, beginning with the historical dramas at least, is a method of ironic reduction that turns the grandiose into the commonplace. That method might be seen here to the extent that one of the most fantastic cities in the world is introduced through a solidly, and perhaps sordidly, realistic detail. But, in point of fact, the opposite is true as Lubitsch moves from the commonplace to the exotic, both in setting (from any backdoor stoop to Venice) and in character (from an ordinary and anonymous garbage collector to a brilliant romantic tenor). While much of the sprightly mood of *Trouble in Paradise* derives from the method of simple ironic reversals typical of the earlier films, in this scene with its fluidly shifting play between appearance and reality, Lubitsch has begun moving in the direction of the later films which will achieve a subtly more complex tone by muting his style of surprises. Where the reversals of the historical dramas and the Ruritanian musicals suggested that in certain regards royalty weren't all that different from the rest of humanity, here each new revelation does not really contradict the previous appearance: the romantic tenor continues to be a garbage collector, while Venice, for all its romantic fabulousness, continues to be a place where people must live, eat, and put out the garbage at night.

The meaning of Paris is similarly defined by the manner in which it is introduced. The transition to Paris is startlingly direct: fade out on a long shot of the Grand Canal, fade in on a long shot of the Eiffel Tower, an introduction to a setting that is unusually conventional for Lubitsch in this period.* After a beat, the conventionality is undercut when the tower starts to shoot out fanciful thunderbolts to indicate a radio broadcast, transforming this familiar symbol of Paris into an equally familiar, for an early thirties audience, symbol of RKO Pictures. A newscast begins which forms a brief connection to the first part of the movie with a bulletin about that latest Gaston Monescu adventure. There rapidly follows a singing commercial for Colet perfumes and then the introduction of Madame Colet herself at a meeting of the perfume company's board of directors. This abrupt shift in setting is accompanied by a shift in comic modes that moves from the convoluted ironies of the opening sequence to the more direct multiple satires on radio, movies, politics, and commerce.

The satire introduced here marks something of a broadening out, a moving beyond the personal game-playing of the prologue because the concerns of the comedy have now become social in the fullest sense of the word. Appropriately, this broadening out in setting is accompanied by a sudden and quietly startling change in our sense of period. Up to this point the film has been playing in the abstracted time of Lubitsch's *boulevardier* comedies of the twenties. That is, clothing and setting signify a roughly contemporary period, but behavior and social milieu deprive the period of specificity, so that, for example, it is impossible to perceive any major social changes between the writing of *Lady Windermere's Fan* by Oscar Wilde in 1892 and its filming by Lubitsch in 1925, even though the film clearly has a post-World War I look to it.

With the transition to Paris, Lubitsch triumphantly enters the contemporary world by turning the Eiffel Tower, a monument of nineteenth-century art nouveau, into an artifact of twentieth-century technology. The introduction to the main narrative line accomplishes an architectural shift from the old-world Venetian of the baroque Grand Hotel to the Parisian-moderne of Mme Colet's elegant art deco mansion, and with this shift there is a new interest in contemporary matters. Where the opening episode of the film was taken up with lively love-sparring, all of a sudden the talk is of "times like these," a phrase that becomes something of a refrain throughout the rest of the film—wage cuts and unemployment. In effect, the Depression has entered the world of light romantic comedy. When, after a seeming digression to introduce Mariette Colet, the film finally returns to Lily and Gaston, these two characters who had no other care in the world than their own amusement suddenly find themselves confronting a reality of contemporary society that normally should not happen to a crook: they are out of work. And when

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* It is revealing of the changes in Lubitsch's style that, with the singular exception of *To Be Or Not To Be*, all of his films from the late thirties on introduce their settings through fairly conventional establishing shots, a number of them taken from stock footage.

Gaston sees the possibility of getting some money for the handbag he had stolen from Mariette, he sardonically mocks Herbert Hoover by assuring Lily that "prosperity is just around the corner." As Paris represents the contemporary world of business in this film, it is in Paris that these two deft thieves have to worry about the future of their business.

The architecture of Venice ties the city to the past, and not just because Paris since the last century has been the center of the most stylish movements in the plastic arts and design. At the very least since Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, Venice as the centuries-old city slowly sinking into the ocean has been associated with decay. The singing perfume commercial that acts as a musical introduction to the main narrative line structurally parallels the musical introduction to the prologue. Where the prologue opens with garbage, the main body of the film opens with perfume, but if garbage serves as a framework for the whole first episode, it also provides a sense of decay that lingers through the rest of the film. Everything may be rotten, as the perfume ad suggests, so long as you know how to conceal the rot artfully: "It doesn't matter what you say, it doesn't matter how you look, it's how you smell." The real perfume that permeates the whole film is a faint odor of decay as corruption permeates the whole society.

The garbage-perfume metaphors at the very least suggest a criticism of the society in which the film is set, yet the nature of the criticism is not so one-sided as a number of critics have claimed. How ambiguous the attitude is here might be seen most clearly in the perfume ad itself, because the ad begins with a fairly obvious satire. From a satirically worded singing commercial, the humor broadens out to a kind of burlesque with a long shot of an animated neon billboard of a man in evening clothes spraying perfume onto the half-naked torso of a woman in bed who raises her arms in dismay. Then, as the song continues in voice-over, continuing the satirical tone, the images present an abrupt shift in tone as the animated billboard is followed by soft-focus close-ups of two beautiful women dabbing themselves with Colet perfume, the fake promise of glamour in the song suddenly yielding to a genuine glamour in the images.

The startlingly swift changes in visual styles throughout this brief sequence make any precisely defined attitude difficult to isolate. From the sharp focus, clearly outlined images of the first two shots—the stark black against white in the medium shot of the announcer nicely contrasted to the bright white outline of the illuminated sign against a deep black background—the film switches to soft-focus, star-filtered images of isolated women seen in more of a white-on-white style. There is a complementary change in movement within the images themselves, from the bouncy movements of the announcer and the jerky animation of the moving sign to the more deliberate and langorous movements of the models dabbing themselves with perfume. The promise of glamour might be spurious in the song, but the glamour itself is real for Lubitsch.

The commercial ends with the most extreme tonal shift in the entire sequence: a long shot of a mass of workers leaving the factory of Colet and Company. This combination of shots, high-class models colliding with proletarian labor, creates a kind of "dialectical montage" that would not be out of place in a Sergei Eisenstein film, even down to the sophisticated visual opposition created through the cutting, from the curving lines and full volumes of the close-ups of faces to the more angular composition in the long shot of the factory. But if this brief sequence does suggest Eisenstein, the meaning of these oppositions is never quite so clear as it would be in the more didactic atmosphere of an Eisenstein film.

The shot of the workers *is* startling in the context of Lubitsch's career because it indicates a level of everyday life that had been rigorously omitted from his earlier films, and is in fact nowhere else to be seen in *Trouble in Paradise*. The shot of the workers does serve as an immediate bridge into the next scene, a meeting of the board of managers of Colet and Company to discuss the possibility of wage cuts. But in noting that the workers are wedged between high-class glamour and stuffy businessmen I do not wish to suggest that the film presents an agit-prop attack on the evils of capitalism. In fact, the sudden shifts in tone can be seen as effectively undermining *any* didactic purpose. That is, the real glamour of the two close-ups undercuts the satire of the singing commercial as the subsequent long shot of the factory workers undercuts the glamour of the close-ups.

Precisely what kind of attitude remains through all these shifts is difficult to describe. Cynical is the word that might most readily come to mind, and it is certainly the word most frequently evoked by critics, but the extent of Lubitsch's cynicism has been overestimated: there is simply too much that he does believe in and that is best exemplified by how his characters behave to one another. I think it is more accurate to ascribe the shifts in this sequence to the delights of a dialectical sensibility that can and will always posit the opposite of what it sees. In the film's larger scheme, blonde Lily and brunette Mariette are presented as opposites, yet Lubitsch's camera favors neither one nor the other, while nevertheless maintaining their opposition as a constant throughout the film. To the extent that a comic artist can find comedy in a serious situation, as Lubitsch does here with the Depression, he is at heart a dialectician. But while Lubitsch would later find comedy in the Nazi invasion and occupation of Warsaw, his strict dialectical sense, beginning with *Angel* in 1937, grows fainter as he moves more toward a view of opposites containing one another.

The wealthiest character in the film, Mariette Colet, has often been viewed negatively by critics, but Lubitsch's presentation of her, while not without its barbs, is far from negative. Her first appearance comes right after M. Giron (C. Aubrey Smith) requests a wage cut for the workers, and her response sets a keynote for the character throughout the rest of the film:

> GIRON: I'm sure, Mme Colet, if your husband were alive, the first thing he would do in times like these—cut salaries!
>
> MARIETTE: Unfortunately, Monsieur Giron, business bores me to distraction—and besides, I have a luncheon engagement. So I think we'd better leave the salaries just where they are. Goodbye.

At first glance Mariette seems defined by her irresponsibility since her reasons for rejecting the wage cut are disturbingly trivial. And yet her manner suggests both a playfulness and a generosity that directly contrasts with the stuffy, self-satisfied manner of Giron. By the condescending way he phrases the request, implying Mariette could not be as shrewd about business as her late husband, Giron has in fact come close to demanding a trivializing response. Mariette's reply allows for the possibility that she is far from foolish in her dealings with the board, that by playing on a conventional femininity which allows her to be irresponsible, she presents an argument against a wage cut that cannot be contested. She may appear trivializing, but she has also revealed a real sense of style that enables her to get through the thorniest of problems with the greatest of ease. The apparent ambiguity of Mariette's character derives from a conflict between her function in the plot and her actual character, a conflict that I believe may be more exactly defined by determining the generic context of the film.

Trouble in Paradise has been praised for "one of Lubitsch's profoundest comic creations, the progenitor of a whole line of stylish crooks in books, movies, and television" (Carringer and Sabbath, p. 26). As a matter of fact, Monescu comes more at the end of the line than at the beginning, for this claim not only ignores the obvious prototype in E. W. Hornung's "Raffles" stories published in 1902, but overlooks a sudden popularity in gentleman crook films in the late twenties. According to the *American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States* for 1921–30, there were only two films produced between 1921 and 1926 in which a gentleman crook had the lead, while in the briefer period between 1927 and 1930 there were seven films about gentleman crooks. I think it is more than coincidence that this miniature cycle of gentleman crook films parallels the rise of the gangster film, for the gentleman crook may be seen as a high-class version of the gangster, and in certain regards *Trouble in Paradise* draws on both genres.

The sudden siding with lawlessness in these films is not exactly a product of the Depression itself, since the gangster and the gentleman crook cycles, beginning in 1927, antedate the Crash. In the gangster film at least it is possible to see a distorted reflection of the giddily rising capitalists of the twenties. The emotional chaos of the Crash might have helped escalate the popularity of this frequently anarchic genre, but for all the anarchy in the body of the work there was never any question of the law's ability to reassert itself by the end, so that even in the midst of the Depression there remained a belief in the regenerative power of society. Critics at the time might have complained that audiences frequently cheered the wrongdoing of the gangsters, but while the films themselves might have derived some of their appeal from the attractions of unrestrained behavior, it was a safe appeal because the drama inevitably moved toward a destruction of the gangster as if he were a social ill.*

The gentleman crook genre traded on somewhat different expectations to the extent that the crook was at least in appearance a representative of society, and his genteel manner itself projected a sense of orderliness. The gangster, by contrast, was always from the lower classes, frequently an immigrant and, in any case, certainly a newcomer: in other words, an outsider who threatened the established order as much as he might present a parodic image of that order's values. If the outsiderness of the gangster made the solution to his threat a fairly simple one—expel him—then the gentleman crook as an insider presented a greater problem: his threat might be quieter, less obtrusive, yet it was potentially more subversive. Oddly, *Trouble in Paradise* seems unique in realizing just how subversive a gentleman crook can be. In the case of *all* the gentleman crook films listed in the *A.F.I. Catalog* the crook's threat to society is abnegated by the end of the film, either by society destroying the crook or the crook's resolve, usually reached through the aid of a good and conveniently rich woman, to go straight and sin no more.

Some form of punishment or reform would have been necessary after the toughened Production Code of 1934, as may be seen in the Lubitsch-prepared and produced *Desire* (1936), where lady crook Marlene Dietrich ends up marrying honest American businessman Gary Cooper, both as atonement for and release from her criminal past. But before the Code made such a punishment a necessity, the genre itself seemed to accept it as inevitable. Even E. W. Hornung's Raffles who always escaped so that there might be another story finally had to pay for his sins by valiantly fighting and dying in the Boer War. To my knowledge, *Trouble in Paradise* is the only film in which the thieves not only get away with the loot but actually go on to a charmed life of more thievery.

Tino Balio has noted a marked increase in "salacious subject matter" on American screens in the 1932–33 period as an attempt to recapture dwindling audiences, and it is possible to see the more liberated attitudes in *Trouble in Paradise* as part of this trend. Certainly these shifting attitudes are at least reflected in the casting of three gentleman crook films of the early thirties: *Raffles* (1930) with Ronald Colman, *Arsene Lupin* (1932) with John Barrymore, and *Jewel Robbery* (1932) with William Powell. All three of these actors had previously scored major popular successes playing super-detectives: Colman as Bulldog Drummond and Powell as Philo Vance, both in 1929 and both in their first talking roles, while Barrymore had played Sherlock Holmes in the twenties. *Trouble in Paradise* follows this pattern somewhat in that Herbert Marshall in his first talking role, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Murder!* (1930), played an amateur detective. The casting in these cases actually follows the route of the original Raffles stories to the extent that Raffles, a creation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's brother-in-law, was something of a decadent Edwardian answer to the Victorian Holmes. Both Holmes and Raffles see themselves as above the rest of society, but where Holmes, even in pursuing his own interest, manages in the final analysis to conform to the values of his society, Raffles in his elitism sets himself apart. Above all, the gentleman crook genre is elitist, while the gangster film is more democratic in its promise that anyone may rise, if only temporarily, to the top in American society.

To some degree there is a sociopolitical dimension inherent in the gentleman crook genre inasmuch as Raffles' illegal and antisocial activity must find some justification in the illegality of society itself if the crook is to be accepted as the romantic hero the stories usually make him out to be. The original Raffles offered the following explanation for his behavior: "Of course it's very wrong, but we can't all be moralists, and the distribution of wealth is very wrong to begin with." The economic justification appears a mere afterthought here, and that is really all the force it has in the stories as well. Raffles is very clearly not a Robin Hood; his stealing from the rich is not to benefit the poor, but both to fill his own coffers and, notably for *Trouble in Paradise*, simply for the sport. It is not that he cannot be a moralist; he doesn't want to be. And the stories, as well as the subsequent films, play the titillation of his naughty behavior off the audience's awareness of just how naughty it is.

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* A contemporary review of *Public Enemy*, for example, made the following observation: "The audience yesterday laughed frequently and with gusto as the swaggering Matt and Tom went through their paces, and this rather took the edge off the brutal picture the producers appeared to be trying to serve up." A.D.S., "Two Thugs," *New York Times*, April 24, 1931, p. 27.

Gaston is no more of a Robin Hood than the original Raffles was, yet critics who insist on seeing satire in the view of the upper classes here fail to note that Gaston and Lily not only have upper-class aspiration themselves but are at least as selfish as the supposed objects of the satire. Leland Poague, always on the scent for what he considers humanistic values in Lubitsch, goes so far as to see a sentimentalized opposition between rich and poor with clearcut sympathy for the poor in the scene where Mariette is interviewing people who might have found her stolen handbag:

> We get a brief two-shot of Madame Colet and a poor little old lady as Madame hands back a beaded and bedraggled old hand-bag. The moment is fleeting and our sympathy for the poor woman is interrupted by the comically played Trotsky-spouting Bolshevik, but the point is made. For every rich lady upstairs, there is many a poor one down below. (p. 69)

Poague does not bother to indicate how this cliché "little old lady" is made sympathetic other than as a cliché and what value this "point" might have for the rest of the film, and he too easily dismisses the Bolshevik whose entrance, in the undercutting method that I have noted as typical of this film, effectively shifts the tone. The triumphal unannounced entrance of Gaston at this point provides the final shift in attitude and reaches the central dramatic point of the scenes leading up to it, which is to show Gaston's victory over all: rich, poor, conservative, radical.

The film certainly does place a social dimension on Gaston's activity in that its dramatic structure moves toward an inevitable confrontation of a respectable crook with crooked respectability. Giron's unmasking of Gaston and Gaston's subsequent and complementary

unmasking of Giron provide the two crucial actions in the film's dénouement, the first ending the possibility of Gaston's affair with Mariette, the second granting Gaston safe passage out of the country. In this second confrontation, Gaston makes a critical remark about Giron's illicit behavior that offers a justification of his activities more far reaching than Raffles' casual justification: "I see! You have to be in the social register to keep out of jail. But when a man starts at the bottom and works his way up—a self-made crook . . ."

Of course Gaston's use of the phrase "self-made crook" is ironic, presenting him as a democrat among thieves when he is in fact as elitist as any of the upper classes here. Yet in its evoking of an honored value in American society, Gaston's remark does suggest a social norm that governs his behavior. The original Raffles stories are titillating because we are allied with the respectable, moral sensibility of Raffles' amenuensis and compatriot who transcribes the adventures: knowing the difference between right and wrong, we along with the narrator are led into wrong-doing somewhat against our will, but always with the reassurance that we will return to proper behavior, to the social norm, by the end. In invoking the world of American business, as Gaston's remarks frequently do, *Trouble in Paradise* suggests a norm quite different from a *moral* order, and in this regard at least, the film, for all its refined elegance, allies itself more closely to the gangster cycle.

Both Robert Warshow and Andrew Bergman have suggested that the gangster film be seen as a distorting version of the archetypal American success story, the unchecked and ruthless progress of the ultimate capitalist. In this state of free enterprise run amuck, the gangster by virtue of his subscribing to the underlying values of society and then being destroyed by them became, as Warshow sees it, something of a tragic hero. If the gangster film has since the period of its greatest popularity become so identified with the early Depression, this is because the genre itself implied a criticism of the American values of obsessive individualism and unlimited aspirations which the very fact of the Depression seemed to contradict. If the gangster was slowly consuming himself in his own desires, then his sickness reflected a sickness in society itself. Gaston is closer to the gangster than to his fellow gentleman crooks in that he does not so much stand against the norms of his society as represent the fullest embodiment of them. Gaston the crook is a businessman while Giron the businessman is a crook so that, finally, the only difference between the two is a matter of style, and this, as always for Lubitsch, is a key difference.

Much as the critical social analysis here is closer to the gangster film, the escape of Gaston and Lily at the end points to an important difference. The fact that law and order always reasserts itself at the end of the gangster film at least implies an optimistic faith in the society's future: the gangster has to pay for carrying the values of his society to their most logical extreme. It is, then, in the final analysis, the individual who is sick and not the social order. On the other hand, the two crooks' escape at the end of *Trouble in Paradise* and the obvious delight with which the audience is asked to view the escape states strongly that there is in fact nothing to punish.

Something of a peculiar moral theme runs through the gentleman crook genre to the extent that the victim must in some way deserve to be victimized in order that a measure of audience sympathy be retained for the protagonist. *Trouble in Paradise* partly adheres to this formula by structuring its plot around a series of contests, moving from the robbery of François through the pedigree battle with Giron, in all of which Gaston, by dint of superior wit and style, manages to triumph over all combatants. The contest in fact might be seen as a metaphor underlying every scene, with characters covertly or overtly throwing challenges back and forth at each other, the wittiness of the weapons providing a chief source of the film's delights. There is a kind of Darwinian code of conduct that governs the actions of all the characters here with the winners gaining their winnings by virtue of superior style and resourcefulness. Translated into economic terms, as everything in this film ultimately is, this code creates a free capitalist environment of unchecked competition in which the fittest not only survive but amass a neat little fortune as well.

Social Darwinism is an ethic without a morality inasmuch as it defines what is proper as that which works for an individual's success.[*] We condone Gaston's theft at the beginning of the film simply because he has the cleverness to get away with it. From its opening sequence, the film equates success in robbery with success in sex, and style provides the key to triumph in both: the first robbery might keep the fussy François from his date with two prostitutes, but he is in any case not at all up to the kind of smooth seduction Gaston performs in the next scene. The inevitable conclusion: he deserves to be robbed. As François is an easy mark who deserves to be victimized, Gaston more than meets his match in the subsequent scene in the dueling robbery-foreplay with Lily: she steals his wallet, he steals her pin, she steals his watch, he steals her garter.[†] In all cases we never see how these thefts are accomplished, at the same time that there is an escalation of implausibility with each theft—his not only stealing the pin but appraising the stones in it, her not only stealing the watch but regulating it—that reaches a climax of sorts in the theft of the garter. The characters are almost superhuman in their professional abilities, and if there is no question of morality in the robbery that opens the film, that is because Gaston and François do not operate in the same universe.

In the condoning of the robbery Gerald Mast sees a Marxist viewpoint in this work, but then goes on to criticize Lubitsch for not taking "his social realism or Marxism very seriously" (p. 218). This is criticizing the film for a value it does not in fact present or endorse.

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[*] In his book *Social Darwinism in American Thought* Richard Hofstadter makes a connection between Social Darwinism and the anarchical spirit that is relevant here: ". . . social Darwinism was certainly one of the leading strains in American conservative thought for more than a generation. But it lacked many of the signal characteristics of conservatism as it is usually found. A conservatism that appealed more to the secularist than the pious mentality, it was a conservatism almost without religion. A body of belief whose chief function was that the positive functions of the state should be kept to the barest minimum, it was almost anarchical, and it was devoid of that center of reverence and authority which the state provides in many conservative systems" (p. 7).

[†] Lily's theft of the wallet as the initiation of her affair with Gaston foreshadows his theft of the handbag as the initiation of his affair with Mariette. The sexual metaphor implicit in the film's treatment of the handbag is maintained throughout, but becomes more explicit in the last scene when Lily, in her final triumph over Mariette as she regains the exclusive love of Gaston, reveals that she has stolen Mariette's handbag. She holds the handbag in her lap open, while Gaston reveals a packet of money that he has just stolen from Mariette and shoves it into the bag.

If anything, through the escalation of thefts in the Lily–Gaston battle and the increasingly improbable surprises Lubitsch is making his audience feel the exhilaration of a pure competition. Lubitsch's vision in this period is distinctly elitist as the battle between Lily and Gaston develops into a kind of game that has all the excitement of a fine sporting event, a one-on-one battle between two superior athletes. Having once caught the excitement of the game, the viewer cannot then go on to reject a society built on competition. Lubitsch's sympathies lie elsewhere. Again, the distinctiveness of his social vision here might be most clearly seen in his treatment of Mariette.

If Mariette is initially characterized by irresponsibility, she is in terms of the genre as much a deserving victim as François: the world is at her feet, and she walks all over it. But, as there is a definite ambiguity in her stated reasons for not imposing the wage cut, there remains an ambiguity about her victimization. Any sense of her getting her just deserts in having her handbag stolen is in part modified by her manner in first purchasing the bag. A jeweler shows her a handbag for three thousand francs which she rejects as "entirely too much." When she inquires about another, the jeweler demurs that it costs a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, to which she responds, seemingly without thinking, "But it's beautiful. I'll take it."

Since this is the handbag she is about to have stolen, it may seem that the theft is a repayment for her seemingly careless attitude about money. The rest of the film will in fact modify this attitude as her final scene will make clear that this carelessness about her own situation is also a sign of her generosity. There is already in this early scene, however, a quality in Kay Francis' performance which suggests an important dimension of the character to play against her apparent triviality. When she says, "But it's beautiful," her brisk line-reading suddenly slows down and lingers on "beautiful," almost as if she could taste the word as she speaks it. Then she smiles and returns to her quick pace, the decision in effect having been made for her. The excuse about money here, like the excuse about the wage cuts in the preceding scene, is simply an excuse, no more. The real currency this character deals in is sensuality.

Unlike Gaston and Lily, Mariette can afford to be self-indulgent because she is rich; she can live for the moment because her future is assured. Yet if wealth is a source of power for her, the very self-indulgence it allows her also makes her the ideal victim. Dark-skinned, brunette Mariette luxuriates in a kind of helpless passivity much as perky blonde Lily is constantly on the move: in the first confrontation between the two women, a scene that takes place during Mariette's breakfast, with Mariette comfortably reclining in bed, Lily actually has to sit on her hands to keep out of her usual thieving activity, a state of reinforced passivity unnatural to this character. Mariette's overt sensuality coupled with a passivity gives a masochistic coloration to her character that is made explicit when she hires Gaston as her personal secretary. As they sit next to each other on a love seat, Gaston reprimands her for her irresponsibility.

GASTON: Madame Colet, I think you deserve a scolding. First, you lose your bag . . .
MARIETTE: Then I mislay my checkbook . . .
GASTON: Then you use the wrong lipstick . . .
MARIETTE: And how I handle my money!
GASTON: It's disgraceful!
MARIETTE: Tell me, Monsieur Laval, what else is wrong?
GASTON: Everything! Madame Colet, if I were your father—which, fortunately, I am not—
MARIETTE: I see.
GASTON: And you made any attempt to handle your own business affairs, I would give you a good spanking—in a business way, of course.
MARIETTE: And what would you do if you were my secretary?
GASTON: The same thing.

Mariette leans back with a sensuous gesture, hesitates for a moment to look over Gaston carefully, then smiles and says quietly, "You're hired." Mariette's leaning back on the promise of spanking culminates the sexual undercurrent of the scene by her deliberate submission to a physical threat.

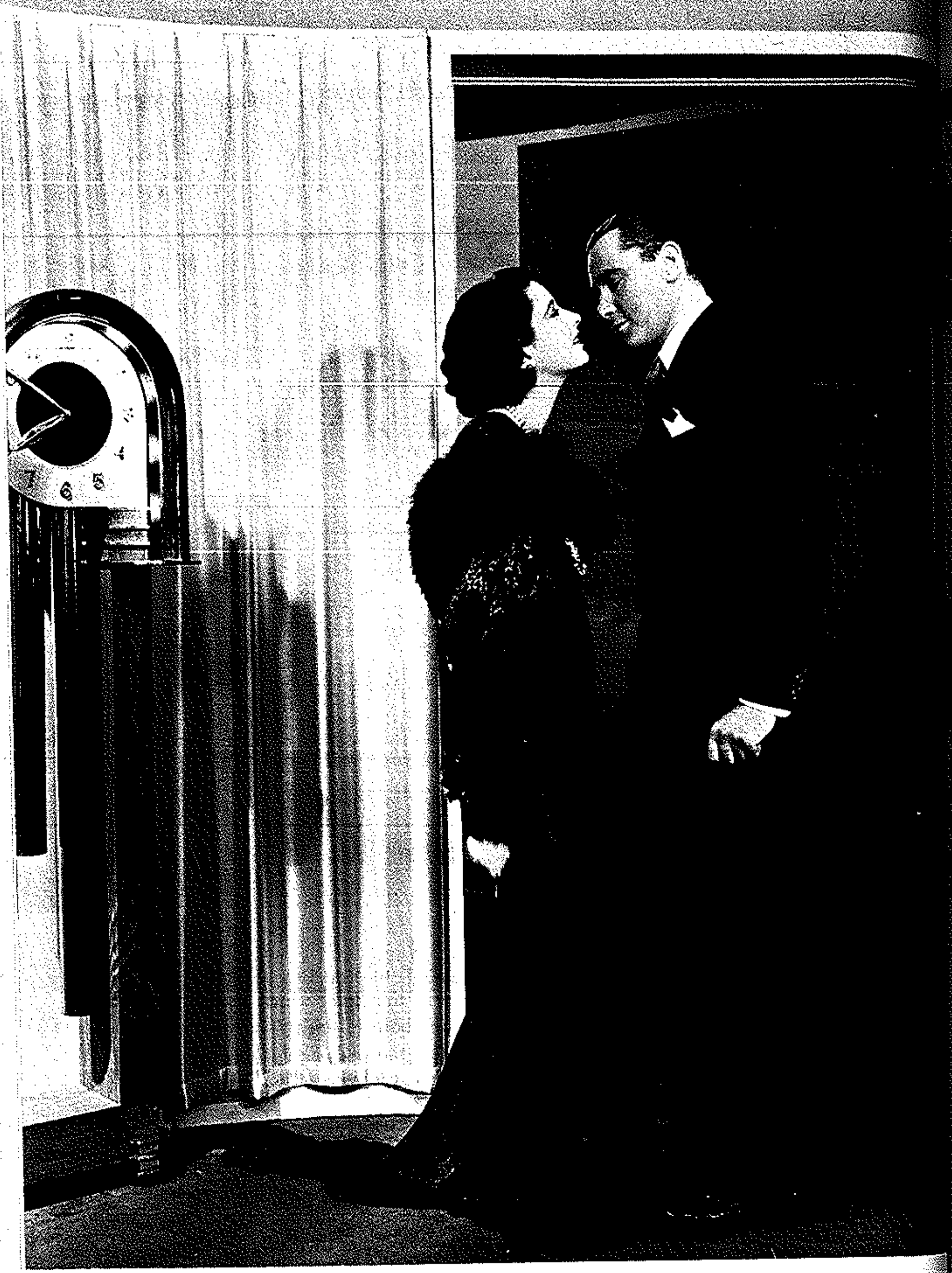
By hiring Gaston and bringing him into her house, she is preconsciously setting herself up as a victim for robbery, and she is a willing victim because of the film's repeated equation between robbery and sex. This equation might in fact be seen as a common element of the gentleman crook genre to the extent that the attraction of the robbery for the crook is partly a matter of its illicitness. In fact, in the Raffles stories each criminal adventure takes on sexual overtones as Raffles leads his unwilling friend Bunny, over whom he has a mysterious seductive power, into illegal and immoral doings, with a suggestion of homosexuality in their relationship to compound the forbidden nature of the enterprise. It is in being true to the genre that the first scene between Lily and Gaston establishes robbery as a developing intimacy, the physical closeness the pickpocket must have with his victim, the penetration of secret, safely guarded areas that the thief uncovers.

As the mutual robberies between Lily and Gaston define their relationship as something of a sexual as well as a professional contest, there is also a contest between Mariette and Gaston, but with an important difference that is defined by a different staging in each of the first scenes for the respective couples. At the start of her first meeting with Gaston, Lily is constantly on the move about his room, both as if to explore it and to establish her own space, the independence of the movement underlined by a cut and new camera set-up every time she makes a move. As the new camera set-up emphasizes, she is always leaving Gaston, while Gaston tries to keep up by reentering her frame. The duel between the two characters, then, begins not with the complementary thefts, but with these movements of challenge and response, with neither character ever managing to get the upper hand. The relationship is then seen to grow out of a mutuality both in the complementary role playing in the first part of the scene that moves all over the room as well as in the mutual respect and professional parity brought on by the thefts.

A parallel type of movement in the first scene between Gaston and Mariette points up the differences between the two couples. Mariette can offer no resistance to Gaston as he easily penetrates the private areas of her house, moving briskly up her staircase as if becoming more intimate, but then undercutting this by telling her to make her personal check to him out to "Cash." As in the first scene with Lily, there is a repeated figure here of one character moving out of a two-shot, followed by a cut to that character alone in a new space. In this case, however, it is Gaston who leaves the frame, but unlike the

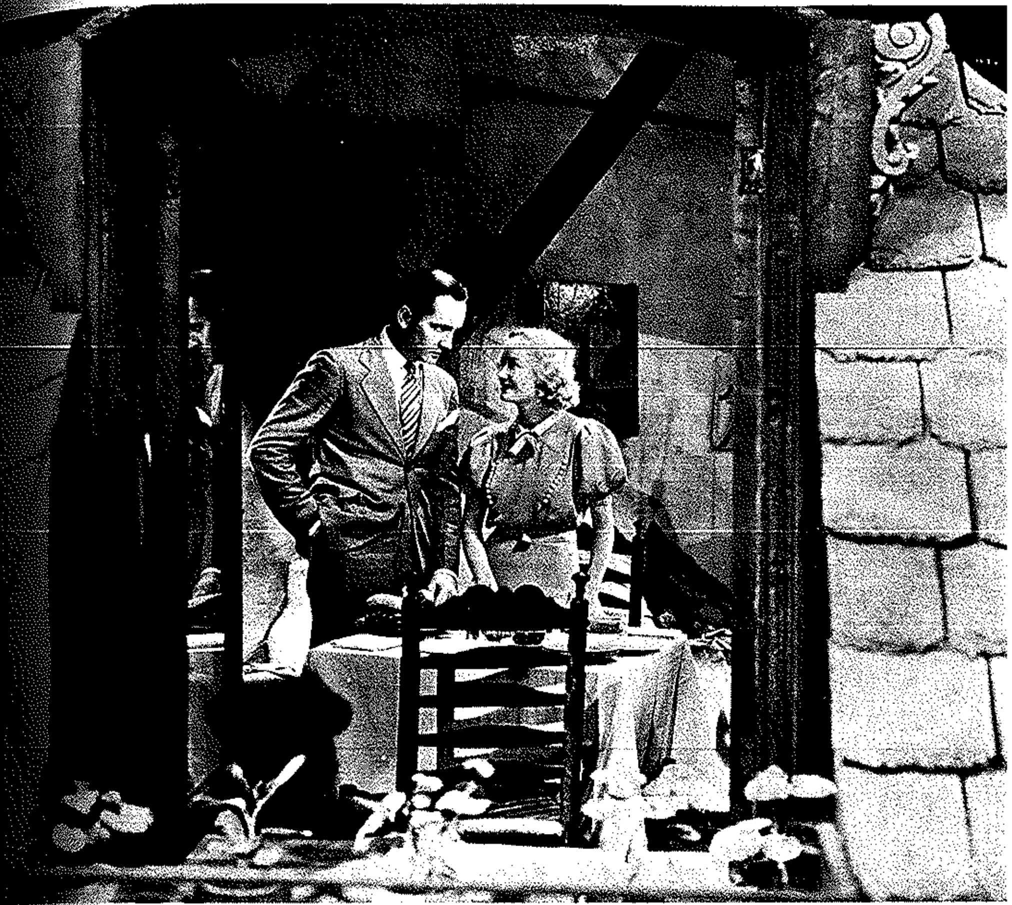
The beginning of an affair. A waiter (George Humbert) informs Lily (Miriam Hopkins) and Gaston (Herbert Marshall) of a robbery in the hotel which was in fact committed by Gaston himself. Lily and Gaston are about to engage in their pickpocketing duel that will initiate their love affair. Note the Old World ornateness of the background that will contrast with the sleek-lined Art Deco of Mariette's mansion. *Trouble in Paradise.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES



The beginning of another affair. Standing by an elegant floor-length clock Mariette (Kay Francis) and Gaston say goodnight after an evening that has been shown to us entirely through clocks. *Trouble in Paradise.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES



Through the window. Tom (Fredric March) tells Gilda (Miriam Hopkins) that he will have to go to London for the rehearsals and opening of his play. The force of the outside world breaks up a delicately balanced ménage à trois. *Design for Living.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Prodigal sons Tom and George (Gary Cooper), returning to their mother of the arts, try to determine if Gilda is still Gilda now that she is also Mrs. Max Plunkett. This little family group plays its game of discovery, in all apparent innocence, on a bed. *Design for Living.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

These rows of identical desks can obscure even as distinctive an actor as Charles Laughton, here playing the oppressed clerk Phineas V. Lambert. *If I Had a Millon.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

earlier battle with Lily, with Mariette there is no contest: she simply loses sight of him twice: first as he leaves to admire a vase in another room, then as he leaves to admire an antique bed in the bedroom of Mariette's former secretary. Of course, Gaston is casing the joint, and he does eventually find the prize safe he is looking for, but an important point here is that he truly is distracted by the bed as it becomes an attractive object in its own right. On the one hand, then, he might be able to escape freely from Mariette's view in pursuit of his own interests, but on the other hand he is being drawn on by something else, and in this something else Mariette proves to be more his equal.

In retrospect, Mariette's suddenly leaning back in the love seat as Gaston continues to sit upright is not so much an act of submission as a challenge, a provocation and a dare for him to join her. As the shot begins to be dissolved out, Gaston, at the very last moment, does relax, but only a bit. Similarly, in what is perhaps the most sensuous image in the film, she submits a challenge to him from what appears to be an inferior position: standing in the middle of a curving staircase that forms a gently sweeping diagonal across the image, her back leaning against the bannister so that her body complements the diagonal curve with a vertical curve, Mariette beckons an offscreen Gaston to come down and dance with her. A separate shot of Gaston shows him rigidly standing at the top of the staircase in an image that is dominated by straight lines. He refuses her, and the rigidity of his position in the frame underscores the nature of his refusal: he is holding back, unable to meet Mariette's challenge. If the genre determines that Mariette must be a deserving victim, the very qualities that make her a victim, seen from another perspective as they are here, give her the upper hand.

The marked differences in movement of the two women in their first scenes with Gaston define both the differences in the developing relationships as well as the differences in their characters. Lily is all movement while Mariette repeatedly lapses into frozen positions. Blonde Lily generally dressed in light colors is active, dynamic, resourceful, while brunette Mariette with her darker wardrobe is passive, languorous, vulnerable. In economic terms this opposition sets up one of the film's central ironies in defining Lily's resourcefulness by what she lacks while Mariette's vulnerability is a matter of what she has in surplus. Lily is active because she has to work for a living; Mariette is passive because she can afford to be. But, as always true to the method of convoluted ironies and dialectical oppositions that dominate the comedy of the film, this central irony contains within it another irony, for Mariette's passivity itself becomes a source of power over Gaston, a temptation to stop, abide a while, and yield his restless life to the quieting lure of this apparently helpless siren.

To side with Lily against Mariette as a number of critics of the film have done is to miss the parity that Lubitsch is at pains to develop between the two characters. They are different, but in their respective affairs with Gaston they represent two exclusive but, for Lubitsch, equally valid notions of love. Mariette's affair with Gaston differs by being defined from the beginning by its temporality. Their first night together to which Lily objects so vehemently is, as I noted in chapter 1, shown entirely through clocks. Mariette will later tell Gaston that they have all the time in the world to pursue their affair, an attitude that contrasts sharply with the almost sprightly urgency with which the affair with Lily began. The playing style of Francis and Hopkins is central to the dialectic Lubitsch is creating here: Hopkins' bouncy allegro playing in counterrhythm to Francis' sensuous adagio. Professionally, Gaston is Lily's match, but his almost supernatural abilities to escape from any and every situation begin to falter toward the end of the film as he comes under the spell of Mariette's more relaxed rhythms and finds it impossible to leave the enchanted atmosphere of her house.

Mariette's house is a paradise that troubles, in different ways, Gaston and Lily. The exact nature of the paradise is made clear by the opening title: under the main title card only, so that it clearly applies to the title alone, there appears lightly sketched an ornate double-bed with canopy that foreshadows the bed that will attract Gaston's attention when he first comes to Mariette's house. As the style of the bed, the romantic tango on the soundtrack and the lyrics of the song indicate, the paradise of this bed is clearly sexual. But, as the film unfolds, the paradise also seems to relate to a bed's more frequent function: providing rest, sleep, possibly even escape.

Mariette's house with its clear sense of detachment from the outside world, as suspended in a void as that bed is in the opening title, is a paradise in the specific sense that it is the only place the very active Gaston and Lily, constantly on the go, driven by their professional activities and the necessity for work, suddenly find rest, Lily against all her desires, Gaston with increasing longing for it. As Mariette's house with its clean sweeping lines and blank white walls offers a timeless escape from the outside world, it is a setting that evokes the timeless, ahistorical worlds of Lubitsch's earlier comedies. Similarly, Mariette herself without a care for the necessities of life looks back on past Lubitsch heroines, while working-girl Lily, fully immersed in her society, looks to the future.

In its separation from the outside world there might be a timeless quality to Mariette's house, but the fashionableness of its architectural style also give it a temporal specificity that signal the incursion of the outside world. It is only at Mariette's house that clocks become a prominent element in the mise-en-scène and, by extension, in the thematic concerns of the film. The temporal theme reaches something of a climax in the scene where Mariette, just before leaving for a party, embraces Gaston and tells him that they can wait to consummate their love because "we have weeks . . . months . . . years." On each successive temporal word, Lubitsch cuts to a different shot so that the couple is seen in one mirror as Mariette says "weeks," in another mirror when she says "months," and finally as a shadow on a bed as she says "years." The method of shooting turns this brief sentence about the passage of time into something of an eternity as it is stretched out over four separate shots. But as it elongates time, it also stops it for each shot freezes the lovers into a series of static images with no movement in the image as there is virtually no movement from the lovers themselves. The internal framing in each successive shot provided by the frames of the mirror and the outline of the bed seems to suspend the couple in a void.

The deliberate slowness here, the intensity of the sexual longing, provides the strongest contrast to the Lily–Gaston affair where both participants seem to be on the move even when they are still. For example, in the embrace that begins the affair between Lily and Gaston, the shooting style creates a sense of movement even as the characters remain stationary: from the first kiss which has Lily and Gaston sitting together on a chair there is a dissolve to the two of them on a couch where they are then dissolved out of the image entirely, each dissolve suggesting a movement without actually showing it.

It is striking in the context of Lubitsch's films that Mariette and Gaston never do sleep together. Even after the introduction of the new Production Code in 1934 Lubitsch seemed able to introduce adulteries into his films without having to punish his characters for their sexual desires, so the omission here has nothing to do with censorship or desire to conform to dominant mores. The embrace in the mirrors is in fact the actual consummation of the affair, and this alone could justify the elaborate shooting style at that moment. Gaston and Mariette have had their moment, itself a kind of eternity that removes them from all the temporal and spatial coordinates of everyday reality.

The lure of Mariette for Gaston is a kind of oblivion, a removal, a dissipation. While the love between them is more overtly physical, it is finally seen as less tangible than the love between Gaston and Lily: at its most intense moment it is first presented as reflections of itself, and finally, and most insubstantially, as shadows. The helplessness, vulnerability, and passivity of Mariette derive from that yielding up to passion that finally leads her, as the images imply, to her own negation. Paradise is a kind of safe harbor that leads away from the demands of the outside world, but it is also in its removal a kind of oblivion that, by denying society, denies all other definitions of self. If the film must finally end with Gaston and Lily on the outside, that is because Lubitsch's characters can no longer operate within the kind of abstracted universe that Mariette's mansion represents.

As paradise is a removal from the outside world, the destruction of paradise here comes appropriately from the outside world itself. The reflections in the mirrors, the shadows on the bed, these deliberately insubstantial images soon evaporate as the outside world crushes in with two challenges: Giron and his self-aggrandizing sense of respectability and Lily with her own demands for Gaston. A number of times in the denouement of the film we are presented with shots of Mariette's house as we have never seen it before: outside traveling shots that connect Gaston with the disturbing influences of Giron and Lily as the camera moves across the façade of the house to reveal their unexpected presence in other rooms. The outside world at this point reasserts itself, and appropriately enough for Lubitsch's first film to deal with a contemporary reality, demands the outcome of the drama. As Gaston and Lily by their very profession are inescapably creatures of their society, they can finally find no resting place in the uncertain flux of their Depression world. The stasis of Mariette's safe harbor must yield to the uncertain journey of a taxi cab in the dead of night.

◆

The number of sacred cows gaily demolished by the film—premarital virginity, fidelity, monogamy, marriage, and, finally, the one article of even bohemian faith, the exclusive, one-to-one love relationship—is staggering.——Molly Haskell

To Molly Haskell's list of Lubitsch's sacrilegious sacrifices in *Design for Living* might be added the original play of Noël Coward. From its first release onward the film has been repeatedly attacked by critics for its supposed betrayal of its source. It was one thing for Lubitsch to adapt *Lady Windermere's Fan* as a silent film for he could hardly be blamed for the film's lack of a soundtrack. *Design for Living* was another matter entirely. It was a talkie which kept only one line from the play, not a particularly witty line at that, and furthermore economically truncated from the original. The drinking scene toast from the play—"Good for our immortal souls. Our immortal souls!"—was shortened to a simple "Good for our immortal souls" in the film, while the entire drinking scene, running to ten pages in the published version of the play and generally regarded as one of its high points, was reduced to a breezy two pages of dialogue in the film script. Even worse for the critical reception of Lubitsch's film was the fact that his film premiered only nine months after the opening of the play, and few critics of the time were likely to place on an equal footing the luminous Hollywood glamour of Gary Cooper, Fredric March, and Miriam Hopkins with the corruscating high comedy specialty turns of Alfred Lunt, Lynn Fontanne, and Coward himself.

The most salient aspect of the play's characters is an articulateness so extreme that one of them can finally be led to exclaim, in an appropriately overwritten passage, that they all talk too much:

> OTTO: "So many words! That's what's wrong with us! So many words—too many words, masses and masses of words, spewed about until we're choked with them. We've argued and probed and dragged our entrails out in front of one another for years! We've explained away the sea and the stars and life and death and our own peace of mind! I'm sick of this endless game of three-handed ping-pong—this battling of our little egos in one another's faces! Sick to death of it!*

Given this kind of verbal precocity, the casting of Gary Cooper with his doggedly slow Western American speech and his ambling (?) gestures must have seemed a particularly gross miscalculation. But Lubitsch himself in an interview was especially critical of the play's talkiness; he claimed he had an advantage over Coward because the play had to spend its entire first act explaining how the three characters had met and fallen in love, whereas he could simply show this. The long *wordless* sequence that opens the film can almost be taken as a send-up of the play's style rather than a filmic adaptation of it: where the characters in the play communicate with each other through an almost endless supply of banter, the characters in the film first make contact through entirely visual means, an ocular exchange where the woman first observes the two men asleep as they will later observe her asleep. When they finally do get around to talking, the first actual dialogue heard in the film is execrably American-accented French.

Even as the film seems to be working in an almost diametrically opposed fashion to the play, comparison with the play is of particular interest to me here because of close contiguity, both temporal and cultural, of play and film. That is, both play and film are products of the same period and really part of the same theatrical tradition. Lubitsch's drastic reworking of *Design for Living* is no different from his usual approach to his source material. Samson Raphaelson reports that Lubitsch's usual working method with him was simply to give him a rough outline of the story, preferring not to let him read the original so he would not "come up with the same solutions." Since most of Lubitsch's source plays were obscure Hungarian comedies, different "solutions" were necessitated at the very least by the different cultural values of his audience. But *Design for Living* was a product of the English and American theater, receiving its premiere in New York, so that changes Lubitsch worked on the original play are especially revealing of his methods and concerns.

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* Coward, *Design for Living* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1934), pp. 74–75. All further references to this work appear in the text.

I think it is possible to claim a superior dramatic structure for the film and more sharply delineated characters where the play is burdened by three people who all talk in identically bantering modes. But I am more interested here in the striking difference in social vision between play and film, with the film's reversal of the somewhat hermetic quality of the play, a quality that is not at all unlike that of Lubitsch's silent comedies, to insist on seeing characters in specifically social as well as sexual terms. In an odd anticipation of later "consenting adults" arguments, the play justifies its characters actions by divorcing sexual behavior from social:

> OTTO: The Methodists wouldn't approve of us, and the Catholics wouldn't either; and the Evangelists and the Episcopalians and the Anglicans and the Christian Scientists. . . . But the whole point is, it's none of their business. We're not peppering the world with illegitimate children. The only people we could possibly mess up are ourselves, and that's our lookout. (p. 58)

The film is hardly so casual about sex, not because it is any less sophisticated, but rather because sex is far more important to Lubitsch's vision, and the characters themselves are more sexual.

Herman G. Weinberg has complained that in adapting *Design for Living* screenwriter Ben Hecht "was, of course, constrained by the Hays Office from utilizing Coward's amoral text to an important extent" (p. 326). Weinberg's "of course" smugly ignores how ineffectual the Hays Office was in 1933, perhaps the randiest year in American movies until the complete liberation of the screen in the late sixties. It is true that even in this period an American movie could not have had a line like "It was just an unpremeditated roll in the hay and we enjoyed it very much" (p. 28), but this omission would have had more to do with constraints about vulgarisms rather than prohibitions on sex. The film is in fact more explicit in defining its characters' sexual feelings: verbally in the playfully erotic description Gilda (Miriam Hopkins) gives to a very nonerotic Max (Edward Everett Horton) of the complementary but opposite physical feelings aroused in her by Tom (Fredric March) and George (Gary Cooper); visually in Gilda's invitingly prone surrender to George on a couch; and metaphorically in two phallic tulips sent by Tom and George to Max and Gilda on their wedding night, which is then used by Lubitsch to suggest Max's sexual failure. Noting all this is not intended as a kind of dirty-minded one-up-manship to make early thirties Hollywood Broadway's equal; rather, it is to point out how central sex is to the characters' lives in the film and how its centrality influences the film's social vision.

Both film and play move toward the establishment of a new and different social unit in a ménage à trois, but the play achieves this with less resistance because there is a marked narcissism in Coward's men. Their hostility to one another derives not from both being in love with Gilda so much as from Gilda's selectively granting favor to one or the other. In other words, the emotional vectors are directed more inward than toward the proclaimed object of their love. By contrast, a divisive tension arises between the two men in the film from their first sighting of Gilda, and they openly quarrel upon discovering they're in love with the same woman. The play begins with the trio already pared down to a couple and proceeds through an infidelity in each of its three acts until Leo, Otto, and Gilda finally decide that a ménage à trois, apparently with sex taken in its stride, is the only solution to their predicament of all loving "each other very much." While the film also moves toward a ménage, it does so in a way that sees sex as something much harder to control. As there is no sexual resistance in the play, there is concomitantly no social resistance.

As a complement to the male narcissism, the play presents a fairly negative view of women that must of necessity shift the focus onto the men's emotions. The men repeatedly insist that they're attracted to Gilda chiefly because she is so unlike other women, the only intelligent woman they've ever met. And Gilda herself, traitor to her sex as Coward would have her be, offers the play's strongest attack on women, all the stronger because it is coming from a woman:

> GILDA: I don't like women at all, Ernest; and I like myself least of any of them. . . . It humiliates me to the dust to think that I can go so far, clearly and intelligently, keeping faith with my own standards—which are not female standards at all—preserving a certain decent integrity, not using any tricks; then suddenly, something happens, a spark is struck and down I go into the mud! Squirming with archness, being aloof and desirable, consciously alluring, snatching and grabbing, evading and surrendering, dressed and painted for victory. An object of strange contempt! (p. 13)

As this portrayal of women necessarily shifts the emotional focus of the triangle onto men, a number of critics have seen implications of perversion, not particularly polymorphic, in the play that do not exist in the film. As Andrew Sarris has noted,

> Two men who can share the same woman have reached that degree of "rapport" where they can share anything else. Once the woman is reduced to a joint possession, she can be more easily discarded, and the wicked ménage à trois stabilized into the logical ménage à deux. ("Films in Focus," p. 38)

A pre-production interview with Lubitsch made more explicit, with an eye-winking crudeness on the part of the interviewer, in what direction Lubitsch wanted to take the film:

> In the celluloid product the inseparably attached gentlemen guzzlers of the play will be a couple of muscle men and not mere crème de cocoa [sic] guzzlers. As Mr. Lubitsch puts it . . . the people in the film will be "unconventional but perfectly normal." Mr. Hecht, who prefers bassos to tenors, saw to that. (*New York World-Telegram*, May 1, 1933)

Sex in the film is seen as disruptive: it threatens friendships and social stability, so the characters attempt to deal with it by creating a new social arrangement. Unlike the play, which ends with the ménage à trois, the film sets up its ménage rather early on when Gilda, confessing that she loves both Tom and George, decides to move in with them to help them with their careers, but only on one condition.

> GILDA: Well, boys, it's the only thing we can do. Let's forget sex.
> GEORGE: Okay.
> TOM: Agreed.
> GEORGE: It may be difficult in the beginning—
> TOM: But it can be worked out.
> GILDA: Oh, it'll be grand.
> GEORGE: Save lots of time.
> TOM: And confusion.
> GILDA: We're going to concentrate on work—your work. My work doesn't count. I think you boys have a great deal of talent, but too much ego. You spend one day working and a whole week bragging. Gentlemen, there are going to be a few changes. I'm going to criticize your work with a baseball bat. I'm going to tell you how bad your stuff is until it's good, and if it's good, I'm going to tell you it's rotten until you get something better.
>
> (*Grandly*): I'm going to be a mother of the arts!
>
> (*Goes to kiss George, who moves directly to her lips, but she tilts his head down and kisses him on the forehead; then, after kissing Tom on the forehead as well, she makes a denying motion with her hand*):
>
> No sex.
>
> (*They form a threeway handshake with Gilda's hand in the middle.*):
>
> It's a gentlemen's agreement.

A kiss on the lips becomes a kiss on the forehead, and woman as temptress becomes woman as nurturer instead, so that the opposition made here between sex and hard work isn't so much a puritanical repression as a way of defining new sexual roles, a familial environment in which the "mother of the arts" is sexually unavailable to her children-artists.

New social roles, then, define new modes of sexual behavior, so that in Lubitsch, unlike in Coward, sex is given a clearly delineated social determinant. But if sex is also seen as essentially anarchic, as it is here, whatever social order is erected to contain it must always appear tenuous. The brief phrases of each character echoing the other in the scene above, each one jumping in on the other's line in the performance, does give the scene a quality of three people trying to convince themselves of something they cannot fully believe in. Unlike the characters in *Trouble in Paradise,* they do not manipulate their own ironies, but rather have their pronouncements undercut by Lubitsch's irony. As the scene begins, the three are finishing eating, so that their first few lines are delivered with half-full mouths. As all three are in the process of denying one physical need, they are satisfying another. Furthermore, the scene immediately following this has Max watching Gilda's furniture, which seems to consist of no more than a bed, being moved out of her apartment to Tom and George's. Whatever sexual implications the bed in itself might have are made pointed by the shocked look on Max's face. Max's reaction is particularly important here for if Gilda is the mother of these two artists, then Max as a representative of proper society completes an Oedipal pattern central to the film as the important father-figure who stands helplessly by as the two sons steal away the mother.

On the face of it, both film and play offer a situation that goes against the grain of "normal" social behavior by contrasting the central trio with the parallel figures of Ernest the art dealer in the play and Max the advertising man in the film. As Ernest and Max define the normal societies to which the trio is opposed, the play retains a more restricted social vision, for Ernest might be a man of commerce, but he also belongs to the world of art, so that his milieu is essentially the same as that of the three leads. It is for this reason that he can show a tolerantly half-amused acceptance of Gilda's amorous problems in the first two acts, although Coward has him reverse his character by an arbitrary display of outraged indignation in the final act that appears solely to give the act some dramatic impetus. From the beginning of the film, Max not only disapproves of the men—he is really only Gilda's friend, not theirs—but he disapproves of Gilda's responses to them as well. Max does belong to a different world, the same world of commerce that provides the setting for *Trouble in Paradise,* here similarly defined by a satirically presented commercial.

As a representative of the dominant society. Max objects to the behavior of the trio on explicitly stated moral grounds, but as befits his profession, he is a pragmatic prude who presents his moral strictures in commercial formulas: "Immorality may be fun, but it isn't fun enough to take the place of one hundred percent virtue and three square meals a day." The most obvious answer to Max's objection here occurs when Tom incorporates the line into his play, and Max, watching a performance of the play, suddenly finds himself laughing at his own seriously intended line. As the laugh catches in his throat, the camera pans slightly to his right to reveal his rather fat neighbor laughing uproariously. If morality is simply a question of physical necessity, then this obviously well-fed man can easily afford to be immoral.

Max's drawn face with hollowed-out cheeks and constantly pursed lips mark him as an ascetic for whom all physical necessities must be kept in check. He is not exactly anti sex as he does insist, over Gilda's objection, on buying a double bed for their wedding that looks like a bit of a tight squeeze. But he operates on a principle of tightly controlled order that is set against the emotional chaos of the central trio, and this order is consistently ridiculed by Lubitsch. For example, Max has neatly filed away his marriage license right between bills for Mandelbaum's Laundry and Manhattan Plumbing, a logical enough place since laundry and plumbing must be important domestic concerns in the anal-compulsively well-ordered world of Max while the apartment of Tom and George has been defined in part by its dirt.

As Max is orderly in the management of his life, he is orderly in the management of his business: prudent, diplomatic, conservative. In all, he is very much a figure of the thirties business world, paying for the hangover of the past decade's giddy successes by proceeding with a sense of caution uncharacteristic of twenties business life. As expatriate artists, Tom and George suggest something of Paris in the twenties, so that their opposition to Max is cultural as well as social. By finally rejecting Max's world at the end of the film, the trio come close to rejecting everything that might have real value for an audience at the time: success, wealth, comfort, clean living, stability, and the sense of a well-defined future. Certainly the most outrageous quality of *Design for Living* for a thirties audience is that, produced in the worst year of the Depression, it chose to make "three square meals a day" one of the recurrent jokes for an audience of which a substantial portion might not be able to afford any square meals.*

As Max defines the world against which the leading players react, Gilda defines the new norms of proper behavior that the larger society considers improper. Gilda is much more at the center of the film than of the play. Dramatically she is the one who keeps the plot in motion by setting the rules and making the choices, and visually she is centrally located in the mise-en-scène, repeatedly framed between Tom and George. In becoming a "mother of the arts," she doesn't reject her femaleness as Gilda in the play sought to do, but rather takes on another socially defined role as woman. It is precisely by accepting Gilda's womanhood in *conventional* social terms as the play does not that the film offers a greater challenge to and a more thorough undermining of conventional norms: conventional behavior is made unconventional by being set in a foreign context. As in *Trouble in Paradise, Design for Living* works from inside dominant social values to challenge them by an unexpected and distancing shift in context.

Gilda acts the way society expects other people to act, but other people in this instance does not include women. As she herself explains her attraction to both Tom and George, "A thing happened to me that usually happens to men." Exactly what happened had already been made clear by Gilda's explanation to Max of what she feels about the two men. She begins with George: "Have you ever felt your brain catch fire and a curious, dreadful thing go right through your body (holding her hands at her breasts, then moving them seductively downward) down, down, down to your toes and leaves you with your ears ringing?" Max immediately challenges this description with a question of what response Tom elicits. When Gilda obliges with a similar description but in the opposite direction, Max turns away from her with a prissily tight-lipped expression of shock, saying "That's abnormal." Such an extreme physical reaction to anything would be abnormal in Max's well-controlled world, but it is more specifically abnormal for a respectable woman.

The challenge Gilda offers is in the final analysis to the old double standard which the twenties was supposed to have overthrown, but never quite did, and which in the world of movies at least was about to be reinstated with a vengeance in the newly toughened Production Code to go in effect the following year. As with all of Lubitsch's women, Gilda's sexual longings are as complex and varied as any man's, but no Lubitsch woman has ever been quite so explicit in her sexual feelings or in making clear how they relate to society's expectations of women:

GILDA: (*excitedly moving back and forth between the two men as she speaks*): You see, a man can meet two, three, or even four women and fall in love with all of them. And then, by a process of interesting elimination, he's able to decide which one he prefers. But a woman must decide purely by instinct, guesswork, if she wants to be considered nice. Oh, it's quite all right for her to try on a hundred hats before she picks one out—

TOM: (*interrupting*): Very fine . . . well, which chapeau do you want, Madame?

GILDA: (*casts her eyes down*): Both . . .

With great excitement and forthrightness, the direct vitality felt in the way she moves back and forth between the two men, Gilda makes herself their sexual equal. But, ironically, at the climax of her confession when she reveals that she wants both men, she suddenly becomes quite still so that one of the men has to move toward her, and she takes on a demurely feminine expression of downcast eyes. The gesture may be seen as partly defensive, a way of avoiding direct contact at the most explicit revelations of her feelings, but it is also playful, a challenge made implicit in the defense itself.

If the play deviously maintains a double standard by making Gilda different from other women, the film in far more iconoclastic fashion totally rejects that standard by couching Gilda's argument in generalized terms and establishing a definite parity with the men. The sudden femininity of her gesture, then, is not so much an ironic debunking of her femininity as it is a way of saying that *all* socially defined forms of behavior have an element of play about them, a give-and-take in which the partners all know the established rules and modes of action and agree to adhere to them as a form of communication even as they offer the most extreme challenges to them.

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* The comedy of this film has apparently retained the power to shock some viewers as Richard Corliss has complained of the disruption of Max's party by Tom and George that it is "a put-down that approaches psychodrama in its abrasive violence" (p. 15).

If all the characters here are performers, then Gilda as the one who defines the rules and hands out the parts is also something of a stage manager. After she explains to Tom and George why she should be in love with both of them, she goes to a couch, falls down on it as if helpless, dramatically uttering, "Oh, I'm the most unhappy woman in the world." As she falls, a great cloud of dust rises from the dirty couch, effectively undercutting the exact meaning of her words with a grimly and grimy realistic detail. Far from being as helpless as that fall on the couch was supposed to convey, Gilda is the one who controls all actions and reactions in this scene as her fall effectively evokes sympathy from the two men. And yet there is an irony here within this irony of the dust in that her apparent helplessness which is shown to be playacting is finally made into genuine helplessness as she cannot fully master all the details necessary for the dramatic effectiveness of her performance.

Design for Living was Miriam Hopkins' third and last performance for Lubitsch, and in some ways her character in it represents a fusion of the characters in *The Smiling Lieutenant* and *Trouble in Paradise*, and it is the combination of these two opposing elements, the innocent and the actressy, that serve to make it her richest performance, the effervescence and vividness deriving from the way the two elements play off each other. She is initially presented as the most knowing character in the film: she sees the men first when they cannot see her, and she studies their faces intently as she draws caricatures of them. When a kind of mutuality is established as she falls asleep and they look at her, she still retains the upper hand by waking when they are too engrossed in her sketchbook to take notice of her. In her early scenes with the men, she projects a knowing quality, an ironic playacting style in her line readings that recalls her initial scene with Herbert Marshall in *Trouble in Paradise*. The men here are no match for Marshall's equally knowing, equally adept Gaston. As there is no potential for battle, Hopkins' grand manner, which later in her

career would harden into an aggressive bitchiness, easily places her in the position of "mother" to these two innocents as she could never have been opposite Marshall.

In another respect, however, this very grown-up, very sophisticated actress is as much of an innocent herself, perhaps not so extreme as the sheltered child princess in *The Smiling Lieutenant*, but closely related to her. The sense of role-playing that Hopkins constantly projects may be read in two ways. On the one hand, it can be seen as a kind of self-protective defensiveness, a way of holding herself slightly above the men by never giving herself entirely to either one of them. On the other hand, it can be seen as a form of self-deception, a pretense to control that she finally doesn't have as her fall on the couch makes clear. In *Trouble in Paradise* the three very knowing central characters are ironic with each other in their romantic relationships in order to *reveal* their emotions, a method consonant with the ironies in the earlier Lubitsch films. In *Design for Living* the men are rarely ironic with Gilda, while she is constantly ironic with them, so that her ironies here become something of a means of *concealing* her emotions. The shift here between the two films points to the direction of the later films in which ironic modes, once the key mode of expression for Lubitsch, will become increasingly questioned, their limitations explored.

Gilda's self-deception, always at least implicit in Hopkins' performance, becomes explict when Tom goes off to London for the rehearsals of his play, finally leaving George and Gilda alone together in their apartment. Breaking off one corner of the stabilizing triangle introduces an element of sexual tension that had previously been held in check by the presence of the other man. George, agitated and not certain how to act, tries to send Gilda to the movies; Gilda, sensing the reasons for this, suggests that perhaps she should move out. A dissolve to later that evening shows that neither course of action has been taken as the two are nervously pacing the floor. The mutual pacing is finally stopped by George, who grabs hold of Gilda's arm, an abrupt gesture totally out of keeping with their earlier politeness and whose force of feeling is echoed by a rapid dolly-in on the two from long to medium shot, a dynamic movement quite unlike anything else in the film and carrying with it the sense of a breakthrough and perhaps a breakdown, as George states explicitly that the social order they have erected for themselves is too artificial to be maintained:

> GEORGE: I love you, Gilda—why lie about it? You can't change love by shaking hands with somebody. We're unreal, the three of us—trying to play jokes on nature. This is real—(*kisses her*)—a million times more honest than all the art in the world.

George's opposition of the kiss to art is not so much a rejection of his art as an attack on the artifice of using their work to deny their feelings, the willing subjugation to an order that *they themselves* have created, imposed upon themselves, rather than taken over from the outside world.

At this point, two important gestures are repeated from the scene in which Gilda first declared her feelings for Tom and George, but with a significant difference. Gilda walks away from George to the fireplace, the camera moving with her much as it did in the first scene, but this time there is no other man for her to turn to. She stands there for a moment, moves back to George, takes hold of his hand and looks down at the floor as she says quietly, almost helplessly, "I love you." The difference in her entire manner renders the meaning of the downcast eyes differently: it is no longer the part of a slyly coy come-on, but a genuine expression of vulnerability. Where she did not look at the men the first time because she chose not to as a way of preserving the equilibrium of the trio, here she no longer has any choice in the matter. She cannot look at George because the emotion triggered by his charge of self-deception has made her helpless. And she openly accepts this helplessness, where before all her playacting had been used to protect her from it: she leaves George once again and goes to the couch where, as in the first scene, she throws herself down and holds her hand to her head. This time, however, she lies in the opposite direction, her movement is gentler and there is no dust to undercut the action. "It's true we have a gentlemen's agreement," she begins with something of the old grand manner, but then finishes in a more matter-of-fact style, "but, unfortunately, I am no gentleman." There is irony here as in the previous scene, but she is manipulating it consciously and, for once in the film, she has directed irony against herself.

In the play the nationality of the central trio is left unspecified, and each successive act takes place in a different location that reflects more the activity than the personality of the dominant character: Paris for Otto's painting, London for Leo's playwriting, and New York for Gilda's interior decorating. Omitting specific nationality here makes the point that these characters are cosmopolitans, sophisticates, perfectly at home in any big city in the world. As place is rendered unimportant in itself, there is little sense of period, certainly no specific markers. The characters themselves are abstracted from any kind of real spatial-temporal framework much as they wish to divorce themselves from the demands of society.

The opposite is true of the film where the three characters are insistently American, and not just by virtue of the casting. The entire opening sequence of two male friends and a woman who find themselves traveling together in France is built around a case of mistaken nationality, so that these three Americans find themselves speaking French to one another until Gilda, frustrated over a problem of communication, utters a very American, "Oh, nuts!" Tom and George stand up, salute, and sing a few bars of "The Star Spangled Banner." The emphatically presented American-ness here suggests a sense of innocents abroad that is central to any understanding of these characters. No matter how unconventional their behavior may be, they never seem corrupt, but rather retain their freshness and vulnerability throughout the film.

Gilda may later proclaim herself mother to these two artists, but the results of their first meeting is to present her as something of a child. As they briskly pace up and down at a brief station stop, Gilda excitedly thanks the men for their invigorating criticisms: "It was certainly good to hear all the names you called me. I haven't heard them since I left Father and Mother." For all their adult behavior, all three characters are decidedly childlike, which might alternately be regarded as the film's saving grace from decadence or its most disturbing quality. When Gilda first visits George and Tom at their garret, she is followed up three flights of stairs by a group of French children, the group enlarging as if in some kind of child's game with each successive landing. As Gilda finally reaches the garret and the trio very formally exchange "How do you do's," Lubitsch cuts to an isolating two-shot of two French boys: one turns to the other and mimics the Americans with a "How do you do" of his own. The associating with children here, then, is seen precisely as a matter of proper social behavior, so that social behavior is itself endowed with a quality of imitative play, a form of acting whose actual meaning might have little to do with the feelings of the participants. The exchange of greetings as the cutaway indicates is far too formal for the level of intimacy these characters have already reached, but the form nonetheless eases them through the problems caused by their complicated emotional involvements and creates a genuine sense of sharing for all three participants by having them all taking part in a game of polite social behavior together.

Significantly, this identification with children introduces the scene in which Gilda will reveal her feelings for both men because this introduction makes clear at the outset that there is nothing false in the playfulness that Gilda displays throughout the scene. Rather, the desire to play games is itself an indication of the socializing impulse, a desire to propose an order and propriety on feelings that hold more the promise of an anarchic divisiveness. Even at their most private moments, then, Lubitsch's characters find themselves defining their sexual behavior in social as well as personal terms. Any kind of living arrangement that extends beyond the couple demands a social order of sorts, and a clear enough hierarchy is established in the scene when Gilda proposes the new living arrangement with herself as the absolute monarch.

There is one striking feature in Gilda's arrival at the garret that is important to note here because it more clearly defines the attitude the film wants us to take to the new living arrangement. Gilda's ascent up three flights of stairs is handled in a single take with a crane shot that moves up with her, starting in long and dollying into full, the entire sequence accompanied by an ascending musical phrase played on an offscreen piano, presumably some practice exercises

performed by another denizen of Bohemia. The complementary movements by the camera in two directions, both up and in, as reflections of Gilda's movement as well as the upward musical phrase on the soundtrack give the shot an unusual sense of harmoniousness which initially plays against the dramatic expectation of conflict that the scenes leading up to this have generated. The pleasing fluidity of her movement to the garret, the complementary echoes her movement is given from the visual and aural environment, make clear that her presence will be far from disruptive.

The artificial openness of space accomplished by cutting open the set endows the camera movement with an almost magical ease and freedom that can best be understood if contrasted with a deliberate echo of this shot that occurs later in the film. Tom, after something of a self-imposed exile in London following the success of his play, has finally returned to Paris to renew his friendship with George and Gilda. He is seen walking up the flight of stairs to the garret and the same ascending phrase from an offscreen piano is heard, but there are two important differences in this repeated action. The music soon changes from the ascending phrase so that it loses its close relationship to the action. And the whole scene is shot more prosaically with the camera positioned on a landing and simply panning to keep up with Tom as he moves from one flight of stairs to the next. The immediate effect is more realistic, the positioning and movement of the camera being necessarily confined by the naturalistically cramped space of a tenement stairwell. But as much as this is realism, it endows Tom's movement with a sense of constriction that contrasts with the freedom of Gilda's earlier movement. The apartment itself is then stripped of its romantic aura from the previous scene, becoming merely, as Tom discovers when a domestic-looking man answers the door, a place where ordinary people live.

In one regard, the treatment of the apartment in the first half of the film makes it this film's equivalent of the paradise of Mariette's house in *Trouble in Paradise*, a world apart from the outside world where these three characters can pursue their own interests with only themselves to worry about. To tighten this connection, I would like to note one stylistic feature from the earlier film that is repeated here in a series of shots taken from the exterior of the building looking in the apartment through various windows. In *Design for Living* this outside-in shooting method is somewhat more elaborated as two scenes are played in their entirety with the camera looking in through a window, but all these window shots serve something of a similar function to those in *Trouble in Paradise* to the extent that they point up a kind of isolation from a larger society. While this mise-en-scène in *Trouble in Paradise* shows a climactic incursion of the outside world, the shots in *Design for Living* reinforce a sense of isolation, making the garret a haven from the outside world in a romanticization of space that is perfectly in keeping with the craning shot up the stairway that heralds Gilda's arrival.

But the shots also come at critical moments in the developing relationship: the first argument between Tom and George over Gilda, the preparations for Gilda's arrival, Tom's telling Gilda that the producer of his play wants him to go to London, and George and Gilda returning alone from the railroad station after seeing Tom off. Through a strongly defined frame a sense of unity is projected even when the drama shows tension and possible division, but the frame also creates a social vulnerability in all three characters by pointing to a world outside at moments when they are most trying to create a private arrangement they feel has nothing to do with the outside world. If these shots then iterate the romantic aura with which the characters themselves view their Bohemian residence, they also conversely create a distancing perspective *from* the outside world that underscores the tenuousness of their arrangement.

As the camera style in effect denies a romantic aura to the garret on Tom's return visit, it must seem that the characters at the end are trying to return to a past that no longer exists, if it ever truly had, and to a relationship we have seen cannot work. In the final scene, Gilda kisses each man not on the forehead, as she had done earlier when they first worked out their "gentlemen's agreement," but on the lips. The repeated dialogue about the gentlemen's agreement draws a parallel in order to deny it in effect: their relationship can only work without sex but, as she kisses each man on the lips, how can there now be no sex, how can a state of innocence be returned to once lost? The buoyant quality of their bravery is balanced by the uncertainty of their future.

A figure of style new to Lubitsch's work appears in *Design for Living* and must be mentioned here because it will become a dominant stylistic element in the later films. At various points in the scene where Gilda first proposes their new living arrangement, Lubitsch cuts to one of the two men alone in a separate space to which he has retreated, then pans back with him as he moves back to the other two. Where the cutting is used to isolate the individual and his particular responses, the camera movement, as it reintegrates space, reunites the individual with his group to establish a sense of wholeness temporarily abrogated by the cutting. In the later films, this cut-and-return-movement figure will at the least serve to define an individual's connection to a larger group as Lubitsch's focus shifts more and more to the construction of a social order. In *Design for Living* the figure is used chiefly to define the relationship of the central trio, so that as the cutting always in the end yields to an integrating camera movement, the couple must always yield to the larger social unit of the trio.

To the extent that the style here shifts focus onto the group, *Design for Living* may seem to be moving away from the anarchic-individualist spirit of *Trouble in Paradise*. Yet, as the trio in their romanticizing attempt at a return to the past consciously embrace a life of poverty and indigestible frankfurters while they unconsciously embrace an emotional chaos, the group sets itself apart from the dominant social order by celebrating values that constantly threaten their very existence as a group. Proclaiming their gentlemen's agreement once more, but now kissing on the lips, they bring the contradictions of their hoped-for future to the surface with such openness and innocence that journey's end for this midnight ride becomes more darkly uncertain for them than it had been for the thieves in *Trouble in Paradise*.

The following year Lubitsch would return to musicals; once again he would utilize a fantasy kingdom, but for the first time he would set a musical in a specific historical time. The double distancing of fantasy setting and historical period suggests that, on the surface at least, Lubitsch was beating a conservative retreat from the brave anarchic spirit of his two straight comedies. In this he was not alone for, in regard to sex at the least, a new conservatism was overtaking Hollywood as well.

PART TWO

THE RETURN TO ORDER

1934-1937

4

CONSERVATIVE RETREAT

THE MERRY WIDOW

The Merry Widow was Lubitsch's first film produced away from Paramount since 1929, but otherwise it combined a series of "lasts" that establish it as a natural watershed in his career: his last film before a three-year hiatus from active filmmaking, part of which time he was production chief at Paramount; his last film conceived and written before the new Production Code, with its extremely restrictive view of proper moral behavior which would have some effect on Lubitsch's work; his last film with Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier, who had become the most frequently used players of his American period; and his last completed musical. Much as *The Merry Widow* rounds off Lubitsch's career to this point, the film nonetheless looks ahead to the later films, most of all in the apparently conservative view of sex and marriage that signals a startling reversal from the more challenging attitudes of *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living*.

It is possible that the shift to M-G-M, the producing studio of *The Merry Widow*, is in part responsible for the more conservative tone of the film, for if Paramount was the most continental and sophisticated of Hollywood studios, then M-G-M was the most distinctively American middle class with its attendant bourgeois sense of richness and comfortable living. In particular, the set design in *The Merry Widow*, for which the film was awarded an Oscar, presents an odd blend of the elegant sweeping-line lightness of Paramount with the heavily detailed solidity of M-G-M, the latter appropriately reflecting the greater weightiness of this film in comparison with the earlier musicals. As the operetta form itself might be seen as a middle-class aspiration to high culture, M-G-M almost singlehandedly managed to keep the operetta-style musical alive through the thirties, a period that witnessed a number of significant changes in the muscial.*

The M-G-M operettas presented a more sanitized form than the saucy delights from Paramount in the early thirties, with the change in mood brought about first of all through a change in casting that replaced the aggressively sexual Chevalier as MacDonald's most popular partner with the stolidly sexless Nelson Eddy. The shift here was a simple response to box office pressure: although critics at the time hailed *The Merry Widow* as something of a comeback for Chevalier, whose popularity had precipitously declined after *One Hour with You* in 1932, the public wasn't buying, and Chevalier was to appear in only two more films before returning to France and staying off American screens for the next twenty years. Even in *The Merry Widow*, however, the free sexuality of the Chevalier character is placed in a more critical perspective than in any of the earlier Lubitsch musicals, and the new conservatism of Lubitsch in this film can be seen as a response to his times as much as the Production Code itself was.

The Production Code of 1934 was so rigidly enforced that even an extremely popular film like *King Kong* (1933) had to be trimmed somewhat for a 1940 reissue. Cutting would not have helped a number of Lubitsch's pre-1934 films where the subject matter itself would have been forbidden. The celebration of ménage à trois and the burlesquing of marriage in *Design for Living* was clearly "too sophisticated" for the new Code, but sex was not the only problem: marrying off Lily and Gaston in *Trouble in Paradise* would not have satisfied the prurient prudishness of a set of commandments compulsively cataloging every potential deviance from a putative middle-class norm.

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* Deanna Durbin with her trained soprano voice and opera star Grace Moore were both popular in this period but, with the one exception of *The King Steps Out* (1936), for Grace Moore, neither appeared in operettas. They most often played singers, which profession gave them a chance to demonstrate their prodigious vocal talents. Straight operettas really continued only in the MacDonald–Eddy films.

Although the Code probably affected the final form that the film took, in its ambience *The Merry Widow* may be regarded as a pre-Code film.* It was at the time one of the most expensive films ever produced at M-G-M, the richest of studios, which meant it was also one of the most expensive ever produced in Hollywood, and since the Code was administered by and for the producing companies, its authority did occasionally give way to major financial investments. How much the Code could affect Lubitsch's work may be seen by the differing treatments of the bordellos here and later in *Angel* (1937). Although Maxim's in *The Merry Widow* is never called a whorehouse, there is no mistaking that that is what it is and on an impressively grand scale at that, as everything in this film is. The positively cheery view of Danilo's promiscuity and the prostitutes' joyous sexuality effectively ignores the Code's stricture that "Pictures shall not imply that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing." By contrast, the treatment of the bordello in *Angel* and the sparse indications about Lady Barker's past employment there are oblique to the point of obscurity.†

As the overt sexuality of Chevalier's Danilo places the film in the pre-Code period, the socially independent and sensually alive Sonia of Jeanette MacDonald has more in common with Lubitsch's earlier heroines than those of the later films. Molly Haskell has noted an important effect of the Code on women in American movies:

> The paradox is unavoidable: while the Hays Office, having assumed the mantle of our national superego, suppressed the salutary impulse of female sexuality, it was also largely responsible for the emergence of the driving, hyperactive woman, a heroine more congenial to current tastes than her sultrier sisters. The "working woman" (fulfilling also a demand, created by the Depression, for a more down-to-earth heroine) was more at ease pursuing a career, whether for its own sake or as a pretext for finding a husband, than languishing in a love nest. (p. 92)

The majority of the heroines in Lubitsch's later films are more "down-to-earth" in Haskell's sense than the earlier characters in that most of them are working women: Greta Garbo's devoted Communist commissar in *Ninotchka* (1939), Margaret Sullavan's struggling shopgirl in *The Shop Around the Corner,* Carole Lombard's actress in *To Be Or Not To Be*, and Jennifer Jones' plumber and parlor maid in *Cluny Brown* (1946). In a sense all the royal women in the musicals as well as Kay Francis' factory chief in *Trouble in Paradise* also had careers, but they were careers that did not so much require a definite activity from the women, but rather offered them by virtue of their exalted positions a power and independence not granted to most women in their society. By contrast the career women in the later films have fewer options for determining the course of their lives and in fact seem explicitly restricted by their jobs.

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* Even though passed by the Code, this *Merry Widow* was considered sufficiently risque, according to Eleanor Knowles, to be cut for television showing in the fifties (p. 116). It does seem unlikely from other films of the period that *The Merry Widow* would have received Code approval even just a few years later.

† The final shooting script of *Angel* contains subsequently cut material that is more explicit on the functioning of the bordello.

The *maistrie* theme that is central to the conflict between Sonia and Danilo in *The Merry Widow* as it is central to the dramatic conflict in most other Lubitsch musicals is possible only in an aristocratic world where the woman's wealth or social position can establish her as the man's equal in every respect. It is precisely because the lives of the career women in the later films are so restrictedly defined by their careers that the *maistrie* theme is displaced from the centers of these films; they cannot battle the men as social equals. In fact, the only genuine freedom the women in the later films can attain—Ninotchka from political struggles in *Ninotchka,* Martha from her oppressively noncommunicative midwestern family in *Heaven Can Wait*, Cluny Brown from English class society in *Cluny Brown*—is achieved through their men. The conventional notion of marriage as a kind of social fulfillment for women that seems to take hold in the later films is prefigured in *The Merry Widow* in that the *maistrie* conflicts of the earlier films find their most fully worked out resolution here, creating a conservative notion of marriage as the stabilizing element in society. But much as this view of marriage might look ahead to the later films, Sonia's merry widow in her independence and political power over men may be taken as a summation of the Lubitsch heroine up to this point in his career.

A number of writers on American culture in the thirties, like Warren Sussman, have noted a kind of turning-in-on-itself, a self-absorbtion to replace the extreme self-criticism of the twenties. With the rejection of an aggressively Gallic personality like Chevalier, there was also a rejection of the entire world of European naughtiness that Lubitsch's American films generally invoked: "The 1920s found the intellectuals in revolt *against* the village; the 1930s witnessed the intellectuals in flight *to* the village" (p. 206)

The Merry Widow is the only one of Lubitsch's musicals set in a specific time period, and it is possible that the time shift was necessary as an added distancing device to make the mores of its characters more acceptable to a mid-thirties American audience. Characters in the earlier musicals might not have had much in common with the audiences that viewed them, but the characters in *The Merry Widow* operated at one further remove.

Where Lubitsch of the twenties, the European genius of the screen imported from Germany, could find an appreciative audience with a writer like Edmund Wilson who reviewed films only rarely, in the thirties his cultural appeal became increasingly limited to film critics, and even here outside the world of daily reviewers he was coming under attack for his values.* In 1939 Lewis Jacobs wrote:

> His style has undergone a gradual change; *his content begins to appear dated because of changes in American tastes.* . . . The acting and situations have become overrefined, the cinematic treatment confined. Lubitsch's technique now has been reduced to a scheme of construction based upon elimination of intervals in continuity. . . . His films have the great virtue of simplicity; nothing is too slight to be put to use. Specializing, however, in the sophistication and realism of promiscuous sex relationships, *a theme in keeping with the old postwar days*, his most recent films do not show that he is keeping abreast with the swiftly changing times. . . . [T]he leadership he enjoyed during the pre-talkie era has been lost; his influence today is of minor proportions. (pp. 360–61; emphasis added)

It is as revealing of the period as the changes in the Lubitsch films themselves that a writer could seriously attack Lubitsch as being old-fashioned for focusing on sex. But Jacobs did at the least indirectly

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*In a review of *Lady Windermere's Fan* (March 24, 1926) Wilson set a specifically pro-European tone by praising Lubitsch as superior to his American counterparts for what he was able to accomplish with American performers: "Who knows but that a certain proportion of the Hollywood pretty girls as well as the Hollywood male popinjays might be turned into respectable performers taking part in attractive films if there were only enough German directors imported to mesmerize them?" In spite of the unrestrained admiration of this review, Wilson seems later on to have lost all interest in Lubitsch, while he continued writing on Chaplin, who maintained an attraction for American intellectuals, through the Fifties.

reflect a critical consensus when he minimized Lubitsch's influence at the time because the thirties witnessed the extraordinary critical and commercial ascent of Frank Capra and Leo McCarey as *the* dominant comic directors in American films. While Lubitsch himself never won an Academy Award, both Capra and McCarey were multiple winners: Capra with *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), and *You Can't Take It With You* (1938); McCarey for *The Awful Truth* (1937) and *Going My Way* (1944).

With the arrival of Capra and McCarey there was a marked shift in the milieu of American romantic comedy from the high-life of the upper classes to more distinctly middle-class settings. And with this shift in setting there was an increasingly pronounced emphasis on things American that reflects the self-absorption of American culture in the thirties. McCarey's *Love Affair* (1939) offers a good example of this new American-ness especially because it stars a Frenchman, Charles Boyer, whose popularity with American audiences had begun to rise right at the time that Chevalier's was failing. Boyer might have typified the appeal to romance that French culture commonly has for American audiences, but his sexuality was less overt, more restrained and somber than the buoyant sexual playfulness of Chevalier. In *Love Affair* his free sexual nature of the past is specifically tied to a European decadence, while his growth is signaled by a journey to America and a monogamous commitment to the all-American working girl of Irene Dunne.* The increasingly American emphasis of films in this period can be no more clearly seen than in the profound changes that overtook musicals in 1933–34.

Although the introduction of sound had brought with it the enormous popularity of musical films, musicals went somewhat out of fashion in 1931–32, the period Miles Kreuger has referred to as the "moratorium years . . . when production of musicals almost ceased . . . [until] the resurgence of the form with the release of *42nd Street* early in 1933" (p. v). Lubitsch's one musical of 1932, *One Hour with You*, had been one of his greatest commerical successes, but, like the rest of Hollywood, he nonetheless abandoned the form until after the great successes of the Warner Brothers musicals with the Busby Berkeley choreography for the masses. Coming out of Warner Brothers and following the generally working-class orientation of that studio, these new musicals created important changes in the form, both in milieu with a proletarian emphasis on the working people who put on the show as well as in musical idiom, drawing more on Tin Pan Alley and jazz than the conventions of European operetta which supplied the musical style for Lubitsch's films. Along with the popular Fred Astaire–Ginger Rogers cycle that began later in the year with *Flying Down to Rio*, the Berkeley–Warners musicals move the form in a direction that might be termed Americanized and democratized.

The most striking feature the Berkeley musicals have in common with the Astaire–Rogers films is their general preference for a backstage format. The characters in all these films were frequently performers themselves, so that even in the more fantastic world of Astaire and Rogers there was something of an emphasis on the performers as workers, and often enough—*Roberta* (1935) and *Swing Time* (1936)—people who were out of work and looking for jobs. Even the most successful "book" musical of the period, James Whale's *Show Boat* (1936), followed the careers of a number of musical performers, most of whom were struggling to find jobs, while Grace Moore, whose trained voice should have made her suitable for operettas like those of the early musical period, chiefly played opera singers in a contemporary world.* This insistence on musical characters as performers also fit in with the increasingly realistic biases of the period, for however unreal the settings of these films might be, as those in the Astaire–Rogers films certainly were, the fact that the characters were by profession singers justified their suddenly bursting into song at points in the narrative.

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*I realize that I have somewhat schematized this film for the sake of argument here. The film might in fact be regarded as more balanced in its oppositions because the nurturing religious feeling of the French grandmother played by Maria Ouspenskaya belongs as much to the Old World as does Boyer's world-weary sexuality. And if Irene Dunne represents a positive step for him, he does for her as well because her own past has had its share of romantic troubles in the form of an affair with a married man. Still, for all the balances between things European and American, I am not doing violence to the film by insisting on a pro-American emphasis because the narrative does take the form of a journey to America, and growth for the characters is clearly tied to the journey.

*Rouben Mamoulian's *High, Wide, and Handsome* (1937) was an odd attempt to "proletarianize" the operetta, but it had no influence on other musicals of the period.

The Gay Divorcée (1934) opened in New York about a month after the premiere of *The Merry Widow*. As much a commerical triumph as *The Merry Widow* was a disaster, *The Gay Divorcée* took the musical in a new direction that marked Lubitsch's work as a thing of the past. In their first film, *Flying Down to Rio* (1933), Astaire and Rogers hardly appear together: in typical musical comedy style they play the second couple who provide light comic relief from the more serious romance of leads Gene Raymond and Dolores Del Rio. Nevertheless, *Flying Down to Rio* ends "prophetically," as Arlene Croce has noted, with "the fadeout . . . [not] on its stars but on Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers" (p. 29).

With *The Gay Divorcee* Astaire and Rogers ascended into the primary position, bringing with them a physical vitality, good humor, and middle-classness that had not belonged to the primary couple in the past. This is not to say that the Astaire–Rogers films did not rely on the second couple formula themselves; as a matter of fact, in three of the films Edward Everett Horton turns up in secondary roles fulfilling much the same function he has in Lubitsch comedies. What is particularly striking is the change in the nature of the primary couple itself, so that in two of the films—*Roberta* and *Follow the Fleet* (1936)—Astaire and Rogers play roles that in the original stage productions had belonged to secondary players. In this reversal there was a denial of the elitist implications of the form:

> They were the two most divinely *usual* people in the history of movies. Not by accident did they exalt commonplace settings with their poetic tap dances or detonate a ceremonious decor with their swing ballets. They were a pair of American folk dancers, glorious ones to be sure, but all their glory flowed from the fact that we could sing their songs and at least imagine ourselves doing their dances. (p. 171).

Croce is right to see the exaltation of the commonplace as distinctly American, and in this regard especially the world of these films is far removed from that of the Lubitsch musicals with their clearly separated classes and preference for the refined elegance of the *haut monde*.

While Lubitsch did not use a second couple in either *Monte Carlo* or *The Smiling Lieutenant*, he did nonetheless split his characters into distinct classes, not necessarily social, so that a hierarchical sense of characterization is strongly felt in these works. Even in his later, more democratic works, Lubitsch's sense of society remains hierarchical, but it is not pushed to the extreme that is clearly present in the musicals. The difference here might be most clearly seen by the way Edward Everett Horton is used in the Astaire–Rogers films. Where Horton always plays Astaire's closest friend, in the Lubitsch films he hardly seems to exist in the same world as that of the male leads. The difference is not so much a matter of making the secondary characters less serious. They are that in the Astaire–Rogers films as well. But for Lubitsch they are clearly inferior creatures.

The Merry Widow sticks with the second couple formula, but in a way that is different from the source operetta and shows how far apart Lubitsch was moving from what was then becoming the dominant musical mode. *The Love Parade* was fairly conventional in its application of the second couple formula: the Lillian Roth–Lupino Lane servant characters were set aside from the masters of MacDonald and Chevalier by more than class. They were also more physical in their relationship with each other, they sang sprightlier songs and, importantly, they danced. *The Love Parade* is the only Lubitsch musical until *The Merry Widow* that has any real dancing in it, but the dance belongs, as it often did in musicals of the time, to the more physical second couple. Peculiarly in light of the strong sexual emphasis of Lubitsch's films, the physical vitality the second couple represented and which Astaire and Rogers brought into primary position had little interest for Lubitsch. After *The Love Parade* the second couple, as well as most secondary characters, lose their physicality and vitality.

While the elan of the second couple gave it an honored place all its own in the world of the musical, Lubitsch in *The Merry Widow* paradoxically turned the second couple into parodic and ineffectual counterparts of the main couple. The marriage of the King and Queen is a parody of a marriage, with little feeling and no equality between the participants. In a mocking echo of the *maistrie* problem that confronts Danilo and Sonia, the Queen easily takes the upper hand over the King, and the comedy of their dialogue is coarse enough to make the dullest exchanges between Danilo and Sonia seem sparkling by comparison. While the King and Queen socially belong to a higher class, in the world of the film they are by their own natures lower.

> It is customary for film historians to assume that Busby Berkeley's style of mass choreography and aerial cinematography were completely eclipsed by the relative grace and simplicity of the Fred Astaire–Ginger Rogers musicals. Actually, Berkeley and Astaire both overlapped and coexisted as stylistic alternatives for the Hollywood musical to follow. (Sarris 1968:172)

The closeness of the two cycles may be seen by the fact that one of the plot strands of *42nd Street* anticipates the rise of Astaire and Rogers although it peculiarly bypasses Rogers herself in doing it. The prerogatives of stardom point to Warner Baxter and Bebe Daniels as the leading players in *42nd Street* among an exceedingly large cast of characters, yet the film charts the rise of Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler over them: Keeler becomes a star overnight as a last-minute replacement for Daniels, making it to the pinnacle of success at the top of a skyscraper at the end of one musical number with partner Powell, while Baxter is, at the end of the film, literally left out in the cold. Baxter was not a musical performer, while Daniels, although beginning in slapstick shorts, ranged from musical comedies to straight parts. Both had weightier screen personalities, and more experience, than either Keeler or Powell, yet the film celebrates, as one number makes explicit ("Young and Healthy"), the rise of youthful vitality over aging experience.

The democratic impulse implicit in the rise of the second couple is made explicit in *42nd Street* with its emphasis on the talent and hard work of the boys and girls of the chorus. The film is a success story of how any chorus girl with enough energy and determination can rise within the democratic environment of the American theater into a star role. In one of the most grotesque moments in the film because of her own subsequent stardom, Ginger Rogers is passed over as the replacement for the injured Daniels, but the manner in which the preference for Keeler over Rogers is made is of some importance here. Throughout the film, Rogers has played a chorus member with aristocratic pretensions, sporting a monocle, a lap dog, and an overly refined manner of speaking. She is the one who finally suggests another member of the chorus for the star role, and she does it by suddenly dropping all pretenses of high class, reverting to a "normal" manner of speaking to deny her own talents and recommend those of another. In other words, outward signs of class are pretentious and phoney: there is no class in the world of hard work, determination, and ordinariness, which are finally the only values, and real American values, to be honored. This attitude, of course, represents a complete inversion of the Lubitsch universe where members of the lower classes can, and frequently do, best the upper classes in their sense of refinement and elegance. Lubitsch's musicals remain implicitly elitist at the same time that the American screen musical was dancing off to a democratizing uniformity of talent and opportunity.

There is one other important way in which the Warner Brothers musicals project a democratic spirit. Busby Berkeley's massive production numbers always exalt the crowd over the individual, celebrating the equality of the individual members of the chorus by making them an inevitable part of a grand design. As John Belton has noted:

> Berkeley's mobile camera never rests long enough on one face to establish its distinctness, but draws all the characters momentarily into a quasi-democratic anonymity. . . . Berkeley's musical sequences, for the most part, are all large-scale production numbers which function as expressions of communal rather than individual identity. Individual characters become part of a large design, yet each dancer remains necessary to that design, an integral part of a kaleidoscopic machine. (p. 38)

The Berkeley dances are spectacles in which the sheer number of participants is a primary part of the experience, more visual spectacle than spectacular choreography. But while the numbers themselves are important, there is no glorifying the varieties of people that make up the dance; rather, individuality is minimized through identical costumes and makeup. Berkeley's numbers might begin with one or two performers, but they soon open up on a vista of dozens of dancers all dressed exactly like the principals as a way of denying the principals' leadership: anyone, as the plot of *42nd Street* demonstrates, can rise from the chorus, so that there is nothing superior about the leads themselves. Belton is right to call this "quasi-democratic" because it might be democratic in its notion of equality, but it also appraches the fascistic in its emphasis on uniformity and conformity.

In its massive dance numbers *The Merry Widow* shows the direct influence of Berkeley for they are very much in the Berkeley manner of grand designs and minimal choreography: the Embassy Ball dance that begins with Chevalier and MacDonald even follows the usual Berkeley pattern of losing track of the two individuals who initiate the number to focus on the crowd itself. And yet Lubitsch's vision is still too insistently individualist to be comfortable with the celebration of sheer numbers that lies behind the Berkeley dances, so that the masses take on an oddly threatening quality by restricting the individual's freedom of movement. Lubitsch's different purposes in his use of dance will become clear through a brief consideration of the musical structure of the film.

In *The Merry Widow* the different levels of characterization typical of his earlier films are given musical definition as well: where the ridiculous characters played by Claude Allister in *Monte Carlo* and Charlie Ruggles in *One Hour with You* could burst into song as well as the leads, the secondary characters in *The Merry Widow* must make do with purely verbal discourse. This distinction has a number of effects. First of all, it endows Danilo and Sonia with a romantic aura that draws even more of a sharp distinction between them and the secondary characters: they are not only more romantic, they move in a world that is more lyrical and more emotional. Second, although they are constantly fighting throughout the first half of the film, the very music that sets them apart from other characters unites them beyond their own immediate cognition, as music will subsequently be used to overcome all their differences and settle all arguments between them. Finally, the music serves to make clear the class differences: Chevalier's style of singing belongs to the music hall while MacDonald's belongs more to the opera house, but this is the only Lubitsch film that draws on their differing style as an element of characterization. Chevalier's songs are all allegro, where all but one of MacDonald's are andante, and strikingly they never sing together in this film. Music, then, brings them together by setting them apart from other characters at the same time that it establishes seemingly unbridgeable distances between them. It is finally only through an abandonment of song and a complementary move toward dance that the two characters can come to accept one another.

Dance dominates the second half of the film as song dominates the first half. When the words the lovers speak to each other are in conflict as they first are at Maxim's, then at the Embassy Ball, and finally in Danilo's jail cell, dance inevitably takes over, in all three cases the "Merry Widow Waltz," to smooth over the opposition. The force of the dance, then, is established by the surrounding dramatic atmosphere in which it appears: dance offers a form of physical communication that draws the lovers closer together while the concepts embodied in words drive them apart so that songs, dependent in part on words for their meaning, must yield to dance.

The dancing in *The Merry Widow* is never very interesting as dance itself, and in this regard Lubitsch was following Berkeley's example where the expressiveness derives not so much from the choreography as from the director's vision of the dancers. Dancing in this film almost acts as an extension of set design: it expresses the emotional atmosphere of the environment as certainly as the settings themselves do, with the vital, chaotic dancing as typical of Maxim's as the formal, stately dances are of the Embassy. But much as both Lubitsch and Berkeley might be described as architectural in their approach to dance, there is an important difference in the expressive aims of their massive spectacles. For Berkeley the numbers themselves are important, and when the lead singers or dancers are swallowed up by the whole, they are literally reduced to small elements of a large design which ultimately transcends their individuality. For Lubitsch, even when his characters disappear from view, the dance functions metaphorically either as an extension of their feelings or as an expression of their relationship to their society. As the mass is important to Lubitsch chiefly for its value as metaphor, his vision here remains as individualist as Berkeley's is communal.

The major settings of the dances, Maxim's and the Embassy, are as spatially distinct from one another as they are choreographically. As the architecture and choreography of the two settings are related stylistically, they are also related metaphorically: Maxim's presenting a visual externalization of Danilo's personality as the Embassy presents an externalization of Sonia's. The Embassy is as commensurately open and orderly in its handling of space as Maxim's is cluttered and chaotic. The Embassy recalls Sonia's palace at the opening of the film, but with an even greater emphasis on order as careful framing, promenading dancers, and striking parquet floors reiterate a linear motif that contrast with the insistent circularity of Maxim's.

As there is a difference in the architecture of the two locations, there is a markedly different sense of space in their respective dances. At Maxim's the space is either constricted as in the crowd dances in the main hall or fairly confined as in the private dining room waltz. At the Embassy the camera always remains at a long distance from the dancers so a great expanse of space is continuously evident, but the great expanse is progressively filled in the course of the sequence as dancers flood in on the *pas de deux* to create a paradox of constriction within openness that reaches its apotheosis in the mirrored hallway shot that makes both crowds and space seem to extend indefinitely: an infinite crowd filling what appears to be an infinite space. The paradox created by the space reflects metaphorically the paradox that Sonia and Danilo have reached in their relationship: an apparent freedom in their behavior together that lets their emotions determine their actions, at the same time that this behavior is placed under the constraining force of a larger order that loses sight of their individuality.

My description of Maxim's and the Embassy suggests an opposition of fragmented and whole spaces that should be familiar from earlier Lubitsch films, and *The Merry Widow* is in fact the last film in which this opposition will be important to his style. Since the film presents a movement toward dominant whole spaces, I am tempted to allegorize the style here as a reflection of stylistic changes in Lubitsch's career. On the one hand, *The Merry Widow* is the fullest realization of the spatial opposition delineated in earlier films, yet on the other it clearly looks ahead to the later films because of a structural difference in the way the opposition is employed here. *The Merry Widow* begins with a play between fragmented and whole spaces that operates throughout the entire film and places the characters from the start into a larger framework as insistently as the later films will do. Furthermore, where the lead characters in the earlier films might be associated with fragmented space as a means of marking the isolation of their emotions, the different spaces in *The Merry Widow* attach themselves to different characters to define conflicts in personalities.

From the opening, *The Merry Widow* establishes two planes of activity through opposing two kinds of space: the public spectacle of a military parade seen in the opening long shots, and the romantic intimacies exchanged between Danilo and countless willing girls in close-ups and medium shots. The first two shots which show the parade reflect the orderly progression of marchers: the first a moving shot that tracks back from the parade slightly above eye-level in order that the image may be dominated by the pattern of marchers; the second, a static shot from further back that reflects the order of the marchers by an orderliness in framing complete with an archway cutting across the top of the image and a spectator's shadowy head blocking off the bottom left corner. In both shots, a spatial whole is established that integrates soldiers into their setting and gives the impression that everything about this parade that has to be shown *is* being shown.

In Lubitsch up through 1934, however, no shot ever really gives a complete picture and no space is inviolable; rather, he often creates the false impression of unity and order for the sake of a comedy of surprise. Just as the regiment of soldiers all nattily dressed in their best uniforms marches down the street, two stray cows suddenly enter the image and disrupt the parade, reducing a grand state ceremony to the level of domestic husbandry. A sense of order is allowed to dominate the image in order that it may finally be burlesqued, and the conflicting attitudes here between an honoring of the order in the first shot and a comic disruption of it in the second operates as a kind of key signature for the conflicting moods of the rest of the film.

As the first two shots give the impression of unity, the rest of the sequence is shot in a fragmented style more typical of Lubitsch up through this film. The fragmentation begins with the third shot: an image of two girls at a window with a goat sitting between them, all three, apparently, interested spectators of the parade. The preceding shots had revealed spectators on either side of the marchers, but not these three, and the abrupt change of space makes it impossible to tell precisely where these three are in relation to the parade. The only connection between the second and third shot is in content with a playful mise-en-scène that places livestock in the midst of humans.

The rest of the sequence continues in much the same fashion, introducing shots of women in new and indeterminate spaces, all of them excited and attracted by one man among the many in the parade, a Count Danilo, who has not yet been shown. When Danilo himself is finally introduced in close medium shot, it is similarly impossible to place him exactly in the parade because nothing in the long shots has prepared us for his location in this medium shot. I dwell at this point on this extreme fragmentation of space because it creates a stylistic figure that is repeatedly associated with Danilo in the first half of the film and reaches its most extreme expression when he first arrives at Maxim's in Paris and is greeted by three prostitutes who are seen independently in a sequence of three separate close medium shots as each in turn pronounces one syllable of his name, "Da–Ni–Lo!" As Lubitsch's architectural style of dance is metaphorical, so his sense of space similarly expresses his characters.

The verbal elaboration needed to describe this cutting style must make it seem far more labored than it actually is: in fact, the effect of the cutting in all the sequences in which it is used is an exuberance and vitality, an excited expression of communication that obliterates all sense of space. If the opening sequence is spatially incoherent, the resulting chaos is nonetheless viewed positively as it is linked to a vitality of expression. As eye movement holds the sequence of shots together, emotional contact between the characters from shot to shot becomes the focus of the scene, and their relationship to the apparently primary event of the scene, the parade, is unimportant. From the orderly public spectacle of the first two shots, Lubitsch has moved to a personal view that effectively obliterates the order and changes this military parade to a parade of private feelings in a public context. The opposition must be established at the outset for the whole film will finally center on the nexus between private and public relationships, with money and love providing the two different ties that bind.

Sonia's introduction parallels Danilo's to provide a contrast in the spaces they inhabit and, by metaphorical implication, their differing characters. Danilo is presented in daylight in a public situation where everything is brightly lit, appropriately, for the gay mood of the scene, and out in the open, a figurative as well as literal illumination of Danilo's shameless lovemaking in public. Shamelessness is in fact a prime attribute of his character: an independence and indifference to convention that may alternately be seen as charming irresponsibility or a lack of maturity, and the film manages to have it both ways on this score. Up to this point in the scene, all the ocular lovemaking seems to point to irresponsibility: Danilo's eyes have constantly kept darting from girl to girl to girl, enjoying all but staying with none. Suddenly, however, he takes on a fixed stare and the smile disappears from his face. A dark cloud obscures all the sunshine radiating from the girls as a deathlike figure all in black with face concealed behind a veil suddenly appears in a black coach cutting across the image. This apparition destroys Danilo's gay mood, but it produces an even more striking change in behavior: where his eyes have been in continuous movement up to this point in the scene, his glance now takes on a constancy that requires him to look behind himself as he continues to march forward, suddenly losing all interest in his other admirers.

Why be so arrested by the deathlike apparition in the middle of all this gaiety? If it is simply a matter of spoiling the fun, then the fun must be of a fragile sort. And there is, in any case, no indication of resentment on Danilo's face, only surprise and, then, an apparent inability to look at anything else. It becomes clear in the following scene that he regards the widow as a challenge: like a spoiled boy used to having all women fawn over him, he expects the widow to do the same. But this subsequent explanation in no way undercuts the immediate implications of this scene: Danilo is powerfully arrested more by what is concealed and deathlike than by what is obvious and vital. Full of life himself, he cannot take his eyes off this figure of death.

The second scene, beginning with passionate gypsy violin music that will eventually lead into Sonia's first song, is dialectical to the first in almost all respects: the crowd of peasants, for the most part paired off in couples, are placed throughout the image in a way that creates a formally ordered composition, and the space they inhabit is presented, by a combination of long shot and a moving, exploratory camera, as a unified area. Where the opening scene took place during the day, it is now night, and the darkness clearly belongs to the widow dressed all in black right down to a black veil that continues to conceal her face. Standing out in the courtyard by herself, her back to the peasants so that she is as cut off from the crowd as Danilo was in it, she takes the music as a private reflection of her mood. As Danilo is from the start associated with fragmented space, so Sonia is presented in whole spaces. And as Sonia retains a sense of privacy even in public settings, Danilo displays his private life in the open as public spectacle.

As the films shifts from the prologue of Marshovia to the main body of action in Paris, there is a marked shift in the handling of space that differs from the spatial polarities of the opening. The different spatial milieus created for Danilo and Sonia yield to a more dynamic sense of space through a repeated use of sweeping camera movements. The increase in vitality felt with the introduction to Paris is accompanied naturally enough by an increase in movement, both of the camera and within the frame. There has been some camera movement up to this point in the film, but mostly on the order of keeping up with character movement. Now the camera takes on a more dynamic quality as each tracking shot creates a sense of progression, expectation, and eventual discovery. The camera has become more adventurous here, going somewhere and looking for something, not simply keeping up with the movement of characters.

The most expressive of these movements is an elaborate crane shot down several stories of a hotel façade from Danilo's to Sonia's rooms as each prepares to go out on the town.* On the one hand the shot conveys fairly simple but important narrative information: Sonia and Danilo are both in Paris ready to pursue their separate desires, Danilo with his Maxim's girls and Sonia with the romantic desires awakened in her by Danilo. The shot then makes a connection between the two characters to point out that they are closer to each other than they realize. In this regard, the function of the shot is similar to the façade shots in both *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living* in that by making connections beyond what the individual character can see it places the character in a larger context that will finally affect his or her course of action. But there is something else here that might best be seen by looking at how the shot begins.

As Danilo sits before his valet having his shoes put on, he twice starts singing a capella "I'm going to Maxim's," each time to be interrupted by his valet's objections that he must first report to the Embassy. Finally, he stands up, brushing his valet aside, and to the accompaniment of a full orchestra sings through the entire song. Before the song is over, the camera has already dollied out his window and begun its descent to Sonia's room. The camera, then, seems to move as if propelled by Danilo's vitality, an expansive feeling that is twice restrained by objections of proper social formality, but finally allowed to burst forth, carrying with it something far more than Danilo himself could expect. Music continues throughout the shot and in a fashion as dynamic as the shot itself: an upward change of key as an inverse reflection of the downward movement and a transformation of Danilo's "I'm going to Maxim's" to Sonia's "The Melody of Laughter." If the point of the shot were simply to make the geographical connection between the two, the camera should logically stop when it reaches Sonia, but it does not. Instead, in a kind of unstoppable movement, it travels past Sonia's windows as if it were now being carried along by her vitality into the next bank of windows through which four suitors attending her may be seen.

This is the most bravura shot in the film, and its extravagance is part of its expressive point as the sheer energy of the shot becomes the shot's meaning. For both characters, the new sense of space in Paris signifies a bursting forth, a breaking of barriers, an indulgent yielding to impulse that, by its very indulgence, is the greatest source of its vitality. For both Danilo and Sonia the emotion must be seen as purely egocentric since it sets the world in motion in conformity

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* This one "shot" is actually made up of three separate shots using a miniature of the hotel façade in the middle shot, but the total effect is of one continuous movement, so that it makes most sense to read the three as one shot.

to their emotions. It is for this reason that the camera finally comes to rest only on Sonia's suitors because they present a multiplicity of partners that draws an unexpected parallel between her and Danilo. Sonia, the character who will soon come to stand for exclusive monogamous commitment, is here herself enjoying Danilo-like delights. But Sonia's adventurousness is not a contradiction of character for both she and Danilo reflect similarities in each other as well as oppositions; Lubitsch's sense of character is moving toward the dialectical complexities of the later films. As Sonia introduces a sense of constancy and mystery into Danilo's life, he introduces an indiscriminate exuberance into hers.

Lubitsch's first four musicals, for all the celebrated innovations in handling sound film, were fairly conventional in their application of musical form. By contrast, *The Merry Widow* insistently follows its own dramatic line seemingly without regard to musical numbers. Where the earlier musicals established a generically conventional rhythm in alternating musical numbers with straight dramatic scenes that carried through to the final fade out, often to the point, especially in *The Love Parade*, of a dull prolonging of dramatic conflict, *The Merry Widow* bunches most of its song numbers toward the beginning of the narrative—there are in fact four separate song numbers in the first twenty minutes—while the second half of the film has no song numbers outside of a brief reprise of one from the opening sequence.

As songs are progressively omitted from the narrative, the film transforms itself from a musical of song numbers to a musical of dances. The middle portion of the film is as dominated by dancing as the opening was by singing, with brief dialogue scenes interrupting, as they had in the opening, an otherwise continuous musical momentum. The absence of songs in the second half creates a new emotional atmosphere. The first half of the film has a more personal focus that is perhaps best seen in the fact that Sonia's first three songs are sung *to herself*. The central dramatic conflict of the first half is resolved by the time of the Embassy Ball: if Danilo's joyous promiscuity is opposed to Sonia's monogamous romanticism, they are brought into greater alignment than either of them seems to realize at Maxim's, when Danilo becomes obsessed with her. All he has to do is find her, and that he does soon enough at the Embassy.

Instead of being able to move toward marriage, as Danilo's new feeling for commitment should allow, the couple once again finds itself in a state of conflict as the scope of the drama broadens from a personal to a social perspective that occupies the rest of the film: Sonia's romantic idealism that demands a pure unthinking love battling against the sense of ulterior purpose in marriage as a sociopolitical necessity. This shift from personal to social is paralleled by the shift from singing to dancing, for dance is a social activity as it demands a partner while singing, at least as this film presents it, may be private. Mating is a personal matter, while marriage, which is the central concern for the second half of the film, belongs to society at large.

Far more than the original operetta, Lubitsch's *Merry Widow* realizes the dialectical implications of the title. In the broadest structure, the two halves of the film create an opposition that is repeatedly realized on a local level throughout the narrative. I have already noted how Sonia's surprise appearance at Danilo's parade suddenly alters the mood of the scene. As a kind of parallel in the following scene Danilo's sudden appearance within the walls of Sonia's palace interrupts her romantic reverie and abruptly alters the mood of the scene. The dramatic structure of the film repeatedly works on a whole series of shifting moods and tonalities: gay-somber, public-private, chaotic-orderly, light-dark, high contrast black-white and, most importantly, life-death. The parallel interruptions of the opening scenes establish a structural pattern for the rest of the film and point to the disturbing emotional influence that each character will produce on the other throughout: Danilo's appearance in Paris, taking Sonia away from her suitors; Sonia's appearance at Maxim's, taking Danilo away from his bevy of girls; Sonia dancing Danilo out of his anger at Maxim's; Danilo dancing Sonia out of her anger at the Embassy Ball; and so on. As this constant shifting back and forth makes *The Merry Widow* Lubitsch's most dialectical film, it presents the conflict between types of love typical of his films in this period in its sharpest focus.

As the dialectic is fully maintained through the final scene of the film, *The Merry Widow* alone among the musicals has not the feeling of a hasty resolution so much as a full-bodied realization of its dramatic ambiguities. While monogamous commitment is presented as the first step to growth for Danilo, it is also a last stop because marriage in the film is presented as a static experience: once reached, all further growth ceases, and the romantic ideal of eternal love that Sonia holds out to Danilo segues into a living death. Sonia's initial appearance as a figure of death that so arrested Danilo, far from being contradicted by the rest of the film, is confirmed in the final scene.

There is an explicit echo in the dialogue that makes this equation between marriage and death most specific. At his trial Danilo declares himself guilty of treason in his willingness to marry Sonia in the following terms:

> DANILO: Any man who could waltz through life with hundreds of women and is willing to walk through life with one should be hanged.

When Sonia later visits Danilo in his jail cell and he embraces her, she reminds him of this declaration:

> SONIA: Oh, please—any man who could waltz through life with hundreds of women and is willing to walk through life with one . . .
> DANILO: Should be married!

While the ending of *The Merry Widow* appears to come down more firmly on the side of monogamous commitment as a reflection of the increasingly conservative mood of the time, in its equation of marriage with death the ending is equally, albeit more quietly, as unsettling as the unresolved endings of *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living*.

The strong sense of finality attached to a happy ending makes it clear why the characters in the earlier film might well have preferred an uncertain future: their flight from their societies is a flight from death. As Danilo and Sonia move toward the social institution of marriage, they are moving toward an acceptance of themselves as social beings, a designation that must in part deny their individuality. If the marriage that generally ends a romantic comedy holds out the promise of a new social order, then the dialectical method of *The Merry Widow*, by cutting back and forth between controlling government officials outside the jail cell and the trapped lovers within, presents both an assured future for society at the same time that it makes clear the limited existence of the individuals.

I have noted above that the dance numbers here, unlike those in a Busby Berkeley musical, take on a metaphorical quality that reflects the emotional state of the lovers and their position in society. Now that the central dialectic of the film is in sharper focus, I would like to look more specifically at the dances to see how they fit into this scheme. Maxim's, which introduces dance to this film, begins with an explosion of movement where every element of the image seems set in motion: raised can-can skirts with black-hemmed white crinolines forming an infinite number of revolving concentric circles; a setting full of obstacles—pillars, tables, stairs—to set off the frenzied activity of the crowd and emphasize the tracking of the camera; and, in the most extreme expression of movement, men and women standing at a bar with their torsos swaying in time to the music even as their feet remain fixed in one place.

Danilo's arrival at Maxim's creates a parallel to the opening of the film: Danilo surrounded by women all apparently in love with him, a reprise of the song "Girls! Girls! Girls!" and, finally, the parallel interruption offered by Sonia's entrance. The repetition of narrative material here must call into question what Danilo finds so special about Maxim's because he seems to be getting pretty much the same thing back in Marshovia. A difference in the shooting style provides the key to the emotional differences. For all the spatial confusion through cutting in the opening sequence, the individual shots had an orderly and composed quality to them. Here the individual shots themselves are chaotic: in group shots of Danilo surrounded by his Maxim's girls, all of them dancing, the camera is close enough in on the group to obscure any pattern they might form. The only clear compositional point in these images is that Danilo is always at the center of the mise-en-scène, as indeed all the motion and emotion in the scene moves solipsistically in his direction.

The liberation of Paris for Danilo, then, is not a sexual one, but rather a liberation from all forms of social restriction that he must still be guided by in Marshovia. Rather than pay the required social call at the Embassy upon his arrival in Paris, he immediately goes to Maxim's where he can forget all obligations and responsibilities except to himself. Maxim's provides an escape from society that parallels the safe harbors of Mariette's mansion in *Trouble in Paradise* and the garret in *Design for Living*. It is a world of id without superego, a childish indulgence in one's self and one's own pleasure. When Sonia later tells Danilo "the great lover" that he does not "even know what love is," she is in part supported by Danilo himself, for Chevalier's line-readings take on a slightly mocking tone in any discussion of romance. When he talks to a whole group of Maxim's girls, he declares to all of them at once, "Oh, it's great to be in love," and in response to Sonia's question, "Do you love me?" he replies with a matter-of-fact "certainly," immediately followed by a half-laughing "forever." Nevertheless, the style of the film at this point has taken over the exuberance of Danilo, and to the extent that the style makes the audience share in his exuberance, Danilo's feelings are validated.

If Maxim's is a safe harbor set outside the restrictive boundaries of a class society, Sonia's appearance there perforce reintroduces a social definition of sex for Danilo. Although she pretends to be a Maxim's girl, she immediately attracts Danilo much as she had in the opening scene by defiantly maintaining her own individuality and exhibiting an air of inaccessibility, a manner that must finally mark her as a lady. The attraction of Maxim's girls for Danilo is their total subservience and near maternal devotion to the male. Like a child, Danilo is an emotional tyrant who gets everything he wants simply by the force of his demands. Sonia poses her challenge to him in both sexual and social terms simply by reversing the behavior of the Maxim's girls and treating Danilo as he would treat her, asserting a male prerogative that makes the male uncomfortable. She holds Danilo's face and appraises his beauty just as he had earlier done with her, and she flirts outrageously with another man to reduce Danilo to just another of *her* suitors and thereby deny his individuality much as he had denied hers. Socially, she makes him uncomfortable by asserting her superior position when she asks if he had given her a bracelet she knows is far too expensive for him. This pattern of countering male power with a powerful woman echoes the earlier musicals, but there is something new here as well in the more critical view of male sexuality. Like Gilda's proposals in *Design for Living*, Sonia's appearance at Maxim's rejects the double standard whereby the demand for exclusivity on the part of women acts as confirmation of male potency, while the male, being potent, is left free to roam.

Where Lubitsch's earlier films seemed to endorse the sexual smugness of Chevalier's screen personality, *The Merry Widow* takes an explicitly critical view of it by the challenges that Sonia poses to Danilo. In this regard *The Merry Widow* looks ahead to the later films *Ninotchka*, *To Be Or Not To Be*, and *Heaven Can Wait* where the sexual smugness of the male marks him both as a fool as well as a romantic lead. For all that *The Merry Widow* celebrates Danilo's sexual vitality, his sexual prowess is placed within a limiting framework through an implied comparison with the Marshovian Ambassador to Paris, played by Edward Everett Horton, Lubitsch's favorite actor for asexually ardent, vacuously passionate fool-lovers. The Ambassador is simply an older Danilo, an over-the-hill playboy who, in his own words, "know[s] what to do, but [is] too old to do it." In his first appearance in the film, the Ambassador becomes enraged when Danilo seems to be flirting with his girl, which foreshadows Danilo's rage when Sonia seems to be flirting with another man. In both cases, the men's reactions reveal an aggressive insecurity in demanding an exclusivity from the women as confirmation of their sexuality, so that Danilo's philandering, as much as the film seems to delight in it, also takes on a distinctly narcissistic quality.

The dance at the Embassy Ball metaphorically presents the central dramatic issue of the second half of the film as Sonia and Danilo are repeatedly placed in a larger social context of a chorus of dancing couples. The most strkiing aspect of this sequence is a progression through a series of tableaux that endow images full of movement with an unexpectedly frozen quality which makes the entire sequence the antithesis to the dance at Maxim's. Almost as a betrayal of the sense of free movement that dancing generally evokes, the two lovers dancing alone in an open space are over and over again surrounded by a large chorus as constriction becomes the dominant visual motif: Danilo and Sonia alone on the terrace at the beginning of the dance suddenly surrounded by other guests of the ball; a couple of rooms with the regular geometric pattern of parquet floors setting off the swirling movements of Sonia and Danilo in the later half of the dance, first in a shot of a mirrored hallway filled with couples that are extended infinitely in two directions via the mirrors; and finally in a shot from a balcony that began the Embassy Ball sequence, now looking down on what appears to be hundreds of gracefully spinning people.

Initially this sequence might seem an extension of Lubitsch's method in the "Beyond the Blue Horizon" number from *Monte Carlo* where the emotions of Jeanette MacDonald's song were powerful enough to make the whole countryside alive with song. The first shot of this sequence does have some of this feeling as the other dancers become a grand projection of the lovers' emotions, with the lovers in effect summoning them up to make them dance in time to the lovers' own rhythms. The rest of the dance, however, undercuts this impression in two ways. Subsequent shots show the dancing chorus flooding in on the lovers from all directions and completely encircling them, so that the chorus now seems to be directing the course of the lovers' movements rather than vice versa; that they can never be alone here is made emphatic by this constant repetition. Second, Sonia and Danilo disappear from view entirely, apparently consumed by the faceless horde of dancing chorus. What began then as an expression of very personal emotion has transformed itself into a spectacle that obliterates the individuality of the two lovers. In outline this parallels the general progression of a Busby Berkeley number, but where Berkeley glories in the communal experience of the crowd, Lubitsch finds less of a triumph.

The progression in the sequence from the individual to the crowd is accompanied visually by a movement in space to increasing constrictedness, a lack of free movement and a concomitant sense of inevitability attached to the movement that is made. Society is always flooding in on the couple, controlling their movement by rendering it part of a larger pattern, which is why this sequence is as visually insistent on geometric pattern as the dance at Maxim's is chaotic. The vitality and individual exuberance of Maxim's yields at the Embassy to a severity, a formality, and a near total impersonality: the dance of life is really a dance of death. For this reason it is not at all odd that the widow costume should suddenly reappear in the film, now replicated one-hundredfold. The film's central dialectic that opposes life and death moves in this dance sequence toward a resolution that will have Sonia and Danilo freely begin their future life together within the confines of a jail cell.

As the love affair between Danilo and Sonia goes public, the tone of the film becomes increasingly satiric. In quick succession the whole economic structure of Marshovia is ridiculed by the payment of a newspaper hawker with an egg, almost every aspect of courtroom procedure is rendered absurd with major legal battles turning on trivial points, and the threat of revolution is reduced to the level of domestic crisis as the King, preparing to make a forced move from his palace, wraps his crown in a sheet of newpaper. The insistently satirical treatment of government and society align the film with the anarchic attitudes of *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living,* yet the film projects something of a conservative feeling as well in that the protagonists are able to resolve their conflicts *within* the constraints of their social order and with the concurrence of that order. With this open-ended movement in two opposing directions, *The Merry Widow* established a dramatic pattern that Lubitsch's films of the late thirties would follow. Nonetheless, the predominantly negative view of the dominant social order here allies *The Merry Widow* more closely to the films that precede it. As Lubitsch in the late thirties began more and more to honor the public side of his characters' lives, he also began, without ever fully losing his satiric sense, to find more positive value in the institutions that shape and define an individual's existence as a social being.

5

OUT OF STEP

ANGEL

Lubitsch's tenure as head of production at Paramount lasted just a year, from February 1935 to February 1936. While the appointment proved unhappy for both the studio, which experienced mounting expenses and losses, and for Lubitsch himself, who longed to be back in active direction, it did initially indicate executive faith in him as an astute observer of the commercial side of filmmaking, and Lubitsch's frequent press interviews through the thirties reveal a regular moviegoer with an eye for noting trends.* Nevertheless, during the period that Lubitsch was not directing, American screen comedy was being radically transformed, moving emphatically away from the kind of world and characters that *Angel* embraced. In short, American comedy had gone screwball, while Lubitsch in his return to direction in 1937 suddenly found himself more fully apart from the dominant Hollywood styles than he had been with *The Merry Widow*.

"Both Howard Hawks' *Twentieth Century* and Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* could lay claim to be the 'first' screwball comedy," write Stuart Byron and Elisabeth Weis in *Movie Comedy*. Peter Cowie mentions another film from 1934 as screwball, *The Thin Man*,

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* "During Lubitsch's term in the post, production had lagged, costs had soared, and profits dwindled. For instance, *The Big Broadcast of 1936*, made under Lubitsch, cost $1,200,000 and lost $337,000. The following year *The Big Broadcast of 1937*, made under LeBaron, cost $847,000 and showed a profit of $450,000." Carringer and Sabbath, pp. 12–13.

while Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer couple this film with *It Happened One Night* as "two seemingly routine films of 1934 [that] revolutionized film comedy in the 30's." Robert Sklar takes the genre back even further: "Most of [the screwball comedies] came in the years 1937 to 1940, though the list might begin as early as 1933 with Ernst Lubitsch's *Design for Living*." In a 1940 article, however, Otis Ferguson, who had been a reviewer since 1934, put the genre somewhat later: "With *My Man Godfrey* in the middle of 1936, the discovery of the word screwball by those who had to have some words to say helped build the thesis of an absolutely new style in comedy" (p. 24).

Ferguson does nonetheless consider 1934 as "a calendar year" for American screen comedy, singling out *It Happened One Night*, *The Thin Man*, *Twentieth Century*, and *The Gay Divorcée* for special praise. That the word "screwball" should first be applied only to *My Man Godfrey* and then to subsequent films does not mean that films of a similar type were not produced before 1936, but rather simply that a type of film had become sufficiently successful for public awareness of a type to develop. Ferguson himself saw a tradition behind the films of the late thirties that began with the introduction of sound, which he felt led to a greater naturalism and a concomitant stronger emphasis on character. Nonetheless, the films he cites from 1934 do ring a number of important changes on these earlier comedies.

While the word "screwball" itself suggests a kind of free-spirited wildness, there is a strong distinction between the anarchic comedies of the thirties and later comedy that is best exemplified by the increasing domestication of the Marx Brothers when they moved from Paramount to M-G-M in 1935 to spend *A Night at the Opera* and exchanged scruffiness for slickness: where *Duck Soup* (1933), their last Paramount film, could end in near total chaos, *A Night at the Opera*, for all its burlesquing of opera, ends with a serious duet between Allan Jones and Kitty Carlisle. For this reason, I think Sklar is particularly wrong to place *Design for Living* in the screwball category. Sklar himself does make a distinction between screwball and earlier comedy:

> Screwball comedies were the last refuge of the satire, self-mockery and sexual candor of early 1930s filmmaking, but their iconoclasm was used, overtly at least, to support the status quo. They belonged firmly to the tradition of romantic comedies whose purpose was to show how imagination, curiosity, and cleverness—those dangerous levers of social change—could be channeled into support of things as they are. (p. 187)

Sklar is possibly right that these films were less threatening to a contemporary audience's values, but precisely how they were conservative is a much hazier issue for him.

It is significant nevertheless that he attempts to define the genre in social terms, as Andrew Bergman would also do: "They [screwball comedies] created an America of perfect unity: all classes as one, the rural-urban divide breached, love and decency and neighborliness ascendant. It was an American self-portrait that proved a bonanza in the mid-thirties." (p. 133) The class-merging theme that Bergman notes here works nicely enough for the Frank Capra films of the period, but it is certainly not present thematically in either *Twentieth Century* or *Thin Man*, two of the most cited early screwball films. And, contrary to Sklar as well as Bergman, *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) ends as chaotically as any of the earlier anarchic comedies, with its class conflicts as fully unresolved as the "rural-urban divide" remains unbreached in *Nothing Sacred* (1937). There *is* something of a class issue in all these films, but it is class that is embedded within genre divisions, so that the shift taking place in comedy here parallels the shift I noted in the previous chapter toward a kind of democratization in musicals.

"*Twentieth Century* is notable as the first comedy in which sexually attractive, sophisticated stars indulged in their own slapstick instead of delegating it to their inferiors" (Sarris 1972:44). As a matter of fact, Andrew Sarris' claim for Howard Hawks' film must yield at the least to Noel Coward's 1930 play *Private Lives*, filmed in 1931, a stylish high comedy in which the curtain of each of its three acts found an elegant romantic couple engaged in a knockdown, drag-out brawl. Coward's curtains were comic shock tactics in that they reversed the behavior of the composed characters at the very end of the act, while Hawks' slapstick was more consistently pursued throughout the work. In this regard, *Private Lives* seems something of an anomaly in its period while *Twentieth Century* is at the beginning of a trend. The roots of both might be traced back to slapstick comedy of the twenties and a development in this genre that translated an aesthetic problem into a class issue.

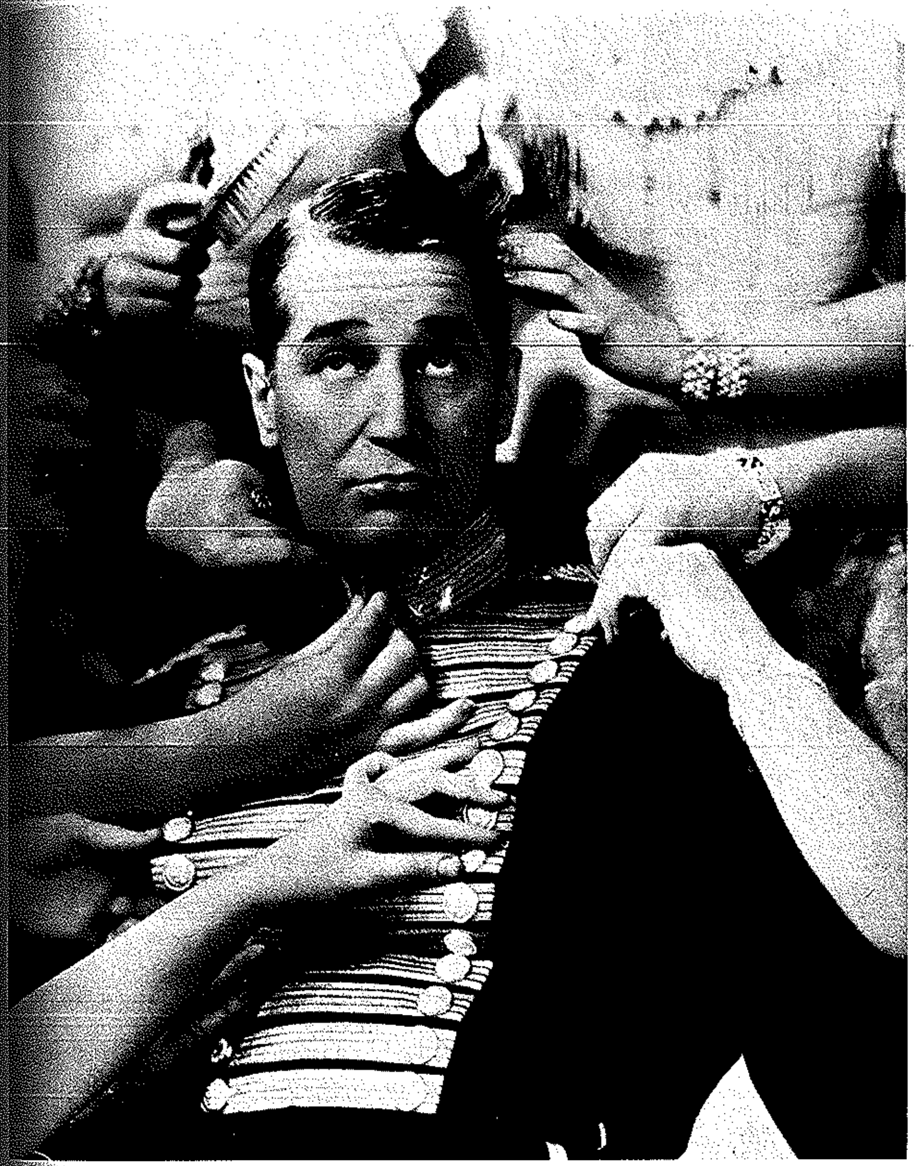
All the major slapstick stars of the twenties—Fatty Arbuckle, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Harry Langdon, Laurel and Hardy—began their work in short films, films whose very length marked them with something of an inferior status. Both for economic viability and to promote their careers, these stars had to make the transition into feature production at some point in their careers. Arbuckle was the first to do so, but significantly his first two feature-length films found him in straight dramatic roles, for the prevailing wisdom of producers in the period could not see slapstick outside the low-class confines of the two-reeler. As the movement into an extended dramatic framework would require more careful plotting, the free world of slapstick had to be confined by the more orderly worlds of more respectable genres. Slapstick had generally been an incidental feature in Western dramatic art, either in the form of the entr'actes for clowns in the circus or secondary characters in conventional theater, but the economic and status demands of film production moved slapstick characters into primary roles in the twenties, creating, in effect, a new art form along the way.

As romance generally provided the key to developing a plot line, how romance was treated by individual clowns in the twenties may shed some light on the origins of thirties' screwball comedy. Chaplin's and Keaton's contrasting views of women in their films, the romantic vs. the realist, points to their different approaches to romantic elements in their feature-length narratives. Chaplin solved the problem of combining slapstick with romance by keeping both in separate worlds, in effect, endowing the *female* romantic lead with an almost magically idealizing aura that the male might approach but never fully join in. Keaton's method was more radical and looked ahead to what would happen in the thirties, for his women operated in the same universe that he did and were participants in the same kind of *physical* comedy, yet no less romantic in Keaton's view for that. If romance belonged to the world of high comedy, while sex was the province of the low comedian, then Keaton, along with Lloyd, changed the nature of low comedy in effect by bringing high comedy romance into its province. Because Keaton and Lloyd were the most "normal" of slapstick comedians, the two most able to integrate themselves into the dominant societies of their films, they were most successfully able to integrate romance into a slapstick format.

While Hawks, who worked in comedy shorts in the twenties, seems influenced by the solutions of Lloyd and Keaton, in *Twentieth Century* he took their method one step further. Unlike *Private Lives*, the physical comedy is a constant throughout the film, and unlike the Keaton and Lloyd features, *both* the male and female leads *as types* belonged to a more dramatic world. This sense of inversion remained the one constant of screwball comedy throughout the period: what made screwball characters screwball was that they behaved in a way that their type was not supposed to behave. And that differing manner of behavior could most often be defined by class.

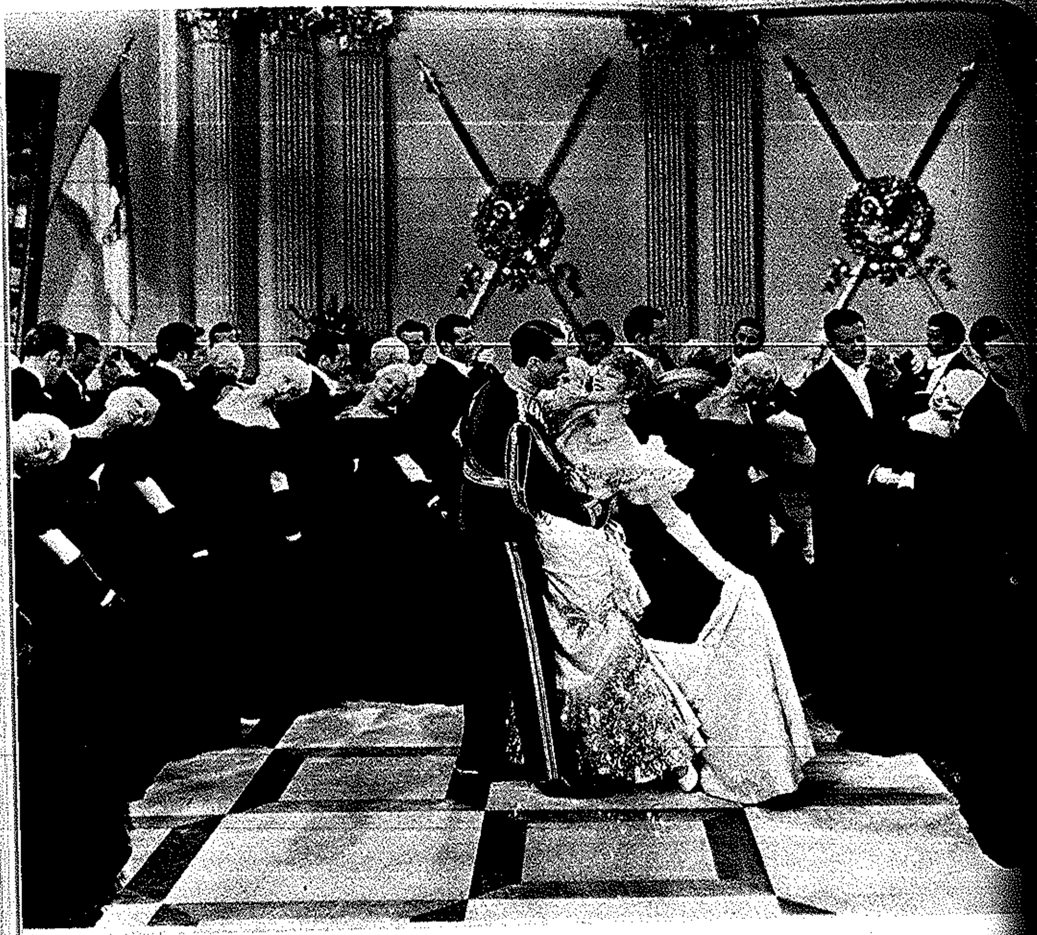
What made *The Thin Man* more screwball comedy than the hard-boiled detective fiction of its source novel was not, as Griffith and Mayer claim, "the private fun a man and a woman could have in a private world of their own making" (p. 324). Rather, it was the sight of dapper William Powell, whose precise manner of speaking always gave his characters a sense of elegant control, breezing through an entire movie and solving its central mystery, all the time as drunk as a Bowery bum. Hawks, in his typically extreme manner, presented perhaps the greatest inversion when he had John Barrymore in *Twentieth Century* desecrate the "great profile" of romantic drama by avidly picking his aquiline nose. The elevated had been brought low, the sublime made ridiculous, and a kind of homogeneity was introduced into comedy in which secondary characters were given an equality of treatment by the nuttiness of the main characters. By not acting according to type, the main characters in effect crossed the class boundaries *of the genre* to create a kind of high comedy for the middle classes.

If Hawks moved toward a more democratic style by bringing the elevated down through slapstick, then Frank Capra in *It Happened*



The pampered male. Danilo (Maurice Chevalier) is returned to sobriety and groomed for the Embassy Ball by the ever solicitous Maxim's girls. *The Merry Widow*.

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER



The Embassy Ball. Danilo and Sonia (Jeanette MacDonald) dance the Merry Widow waltz among the replicated images of her own widow's dress from the opening of the film. The actual shot in the film is further back and at a higher angle to emphasize the pronounced patterning that is typical of this sequence. *The Merry Widow.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

Love in a jail cell. Sonia, irresistibly drawn to Danilo in jail, finds herself locked in his cell with him as the public world forces a private reconciliation between the lovers. *The Merry Widow.*

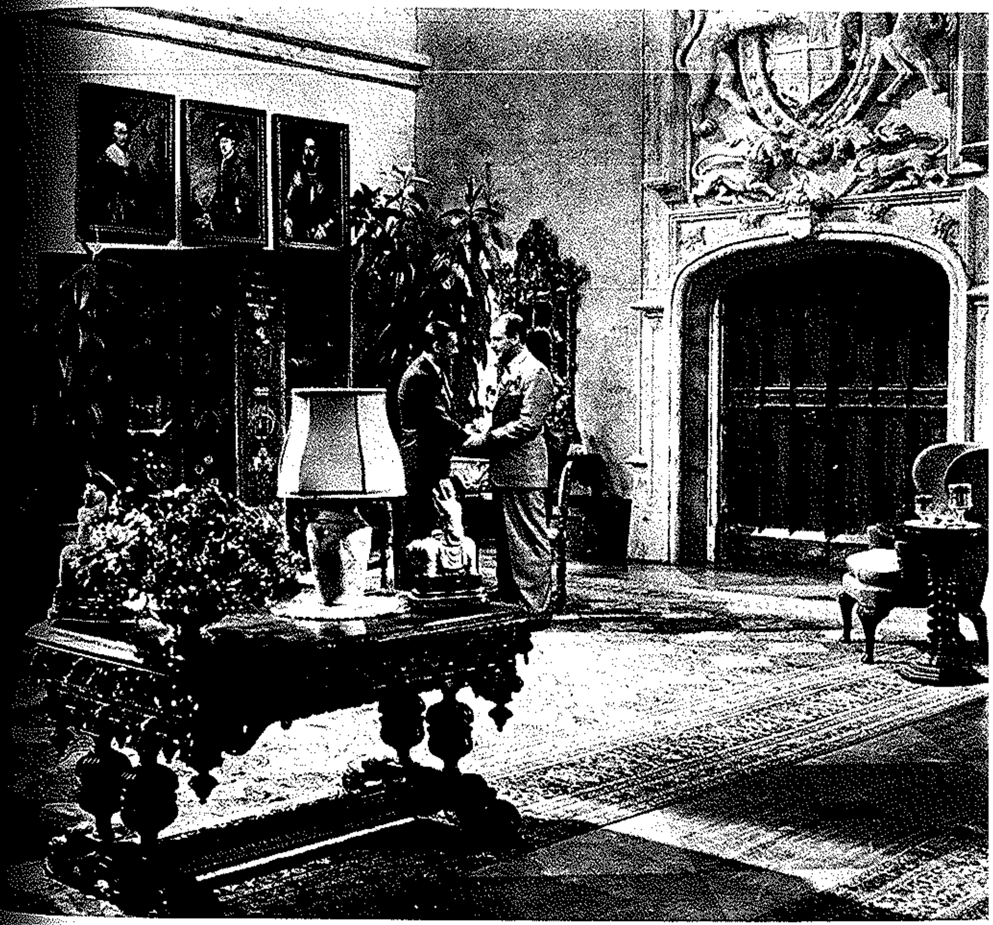
PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

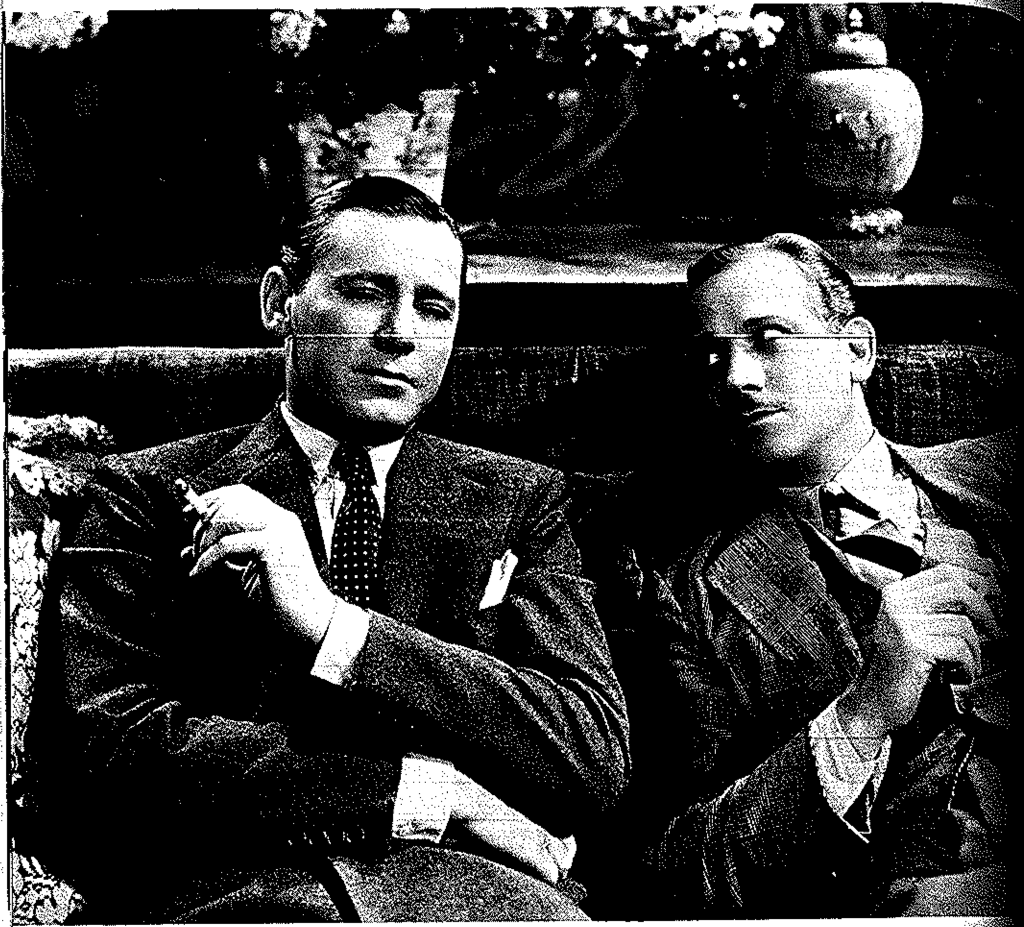
The mask-like and mysterious Angel (Marlene Dietrich) seems to be talking as much to herself as to Tony (Melvyn Douglas), whom she has accompanied to the private dining room after their dinner in the public area of the restaurant. *Angel.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Sir Frederick (Herbert Marshall) welcomes long-time admirer Tony to his house. This long shot shows a space that is far more cluttered and darker than rooms in earlier Lubitsch films.

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES





Two kinds of love. Sir Frederick and Tony discuss the virtues of their respective wife and lover, who is in fact the same person.

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Taking screwball comedy too literally. Nicole (Claudette Colbert) discovers that a straitjacket is the most effective way to curb the pathological philandering of multimillionaire husband Michael (Gary Cooper). *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

One Night accomplished much the same sense of homogeneity by raising the lower characters through a straightforward and nonstylized realistic method of characterization. There is no sense in this film of the class division of character which was a prerequisite of Lubitsch comedy at the time. Otis Ferguson noticed this difference in a contemporary review: "What the picture as a whole shows is that by changing such types as the usual pooh-bah father and city editor into people with some wit and feeling . . . you can make some rather comely and greenish grasses grow where there was only alkali dust before" (p. 33)

The closest *It Happened One Night* comes to a conventional comic caricature in performance is with the rejected suitor King Westley, but if compared with, say, the performance of Charlie Ruggles as the rejected suitor in *One Hour with You*, Jameson Thomas' King Westley is more of a type with the leads. It is not just that the stylization of performance that might mark the film as comedy has been lost, but that the levels of acting style have all been reduced to one style. A more conventional comic approach, as can be found in Lubitsch films up through this period, might have scored easily off the father by placing him on a different plane of existence than that of the two lovers.

Initially, Lubitsch did not respond to these changes in comedy at all. Although he himself had begun his film career in low comedy, even in his later films he generally eschewed slapstick. There is one genuine pratfall for Melvyn Douglas in *Ninotchka*, but it is used not to give the film a slapstick style but to make a character point about Ninotchka's lower class response to comedy. Otherwise, there is little comedy of this nature in any of his films, although a press interview about *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* shows he was aware of the changes in comedy at the time:

> This film will be different from any of his pictures. He thinks it will be fun.
>
> "It is all comedy," he said. "No, not the 'My Man Godfrey' type of comedy. It's a kind of mental slapstick. It will be interesting to do." (*New York Sun*, August 27, 1937).

Bluebeard's Eighth Wife is more of a response to its period than Lubitsch allows here, and there is a grotesque action that approaches

physical comedy at the end when Claudette Colbert forcibly restrains Gary Cooper into a monogamous state by use of a strait jacket, but "mental" is perhaps the right word for all this as Lubitsch shows little feeling for this kind of material and the film takes on a peculiarly clinical cast. As for the division of characters, Lubitsch maintains the split right up through *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, the film immediately following *Angel*. For the rest of his career, however, he worked more in the contemporary mode by trying to create more recognizably human secondary characters. The change in the later films is most apparent in the shift from Edward Everett Horton and Charlie Ruggles as his favorite character actors to Felix Bressart and Sig Ruman.

It Happened One Night has generally been regarded as something of a sleeper, yet its premiere publicity treated it as one of the supreme events in motion picture history. An advertisement in the *New York Times* promised:

> What Happened One Night to these two great stars will make history at Radio City Music Hall. Critics agree it's one of the greatest Comedy Dramas ever put on the screen. It opens Thursday. Don't miss Frank Capra's greatest Columbia masterpiece.

The only uncertainty this advertisement reflected about the film was its classification, not its status: "comedy drama" is trying to have it both ways, and with good reason. In its basic story line and character conflicts, *It Happened One Night* is closer to drawing room comedy than to twenties slapstick, yet by putting its characters on the road against the realistic backgrounds of Depression America, it invoked a world of drama: mobile-home camps, truck stops, a night bus, hoboes riding the rails.

Slapstick comedy of the twenties, where Capra like Hawks began his film work, also played itself out against realistic backgrounds, but this was often more a matter of convenience than aesthetic purpose; realistic backgrounds were more spectacular and certainly cheaper than anything that could be produced in the studio, and they provided greater freedom of movement for the expensive chases with which both Mack Sennett and Hal Roach liked to fill their films. While André Bazin has claimed that slapstick comedy of the twenties was essentially a comedy of space, it was only with Keaton that the casual documentarian impulse of these films moved into a central position of the films' aesthetic (p. 52). For Capra the realism of *It Happened One Night* was not just a matter of background: it was central to the entire method of a film whose purpose was to create the feel of a day-to-day, lived-in contemporary America. It had, as Otis Ferguson noted;

> a trick of building a whole thing out of ordinary little things, all caught in the shifting eye of the camera and picked out as clearly within the cross-country bus with its ranged seats and mission through the night as over the countryside and in the cabins later; and all joined to make a pattern of life as we all know it, with the unfailing tough surface and the grace beneath that we all at least hope to find. . . . common people and common things became real, and eloquent. (p. 23)

That this was not the usual stuff of comedies was made clear by the hedging on category in the ad. But the snowballing audiences that kept the film in extended release and gained it its sleeper reputation understood it as comedy, and that understanding helped change the course of comedy in the thirties. Lubitsch's films would always remain studio-bound, yet background setting does become increasingly important for him in this period as a thing in itself and not primarily as metaphor.

It Happened One Night provided a narrative pattern that was not *the* narrative pattern of screwball comedy, but was nonetheless repeated with some frequency and surprisingly little variation through the decade: a rich, and generally "screwball" woman is brought down in station by a middle-class male. In effect, social defeat became a desirable norm. The common suggestion in Lubitsch that kings and queens and the super-rich had problems in their intimate lives that were familiar to all classes could be seen as a middle-class pull of its own were it not for Lubitsch's insistence on the differences that separate classes and generate inevitable conflict. For Capra the differences were an unfortunate accident of birth that could be corrected through a return to a putative middle-class normality. It is in this regard that Lubitsch, for all his past elitism, peculiarly projects a more democratic spirit than Capra because he embraces a less conformist view of social behavior, a view that would be specifically articulated as democratic when he directly confronts political issues in *To Be Or Not To Be*.

How prevalent, however submerged, the pattern of *It Happened One Night* became might be seen with the Lubitsch-produced, Frank Borzage-directed *Desire* (1936), in which the inaccessible Marlene Dietrich is brought low by all-American Gary Cooper as surely as Colbert had been brought down by Gable. In some ways *Desire* may be seen as a bourgeois, post-Code moralistic reworking of *Trouble in Paradise*, in which the jewel robber(s) are made not only to learn the wages of sin as the Code required, but to give up their aristocratic pretenses as the social environment of the period demanded.

Cooper's Tom Bradley is the flower of the responsible male middle class: hard-working, success-oriented, conventional in morals and not at all hedonistic as he is willing to make business a part of his pleasure on his first vacation after years of grueling, productive labor. He is also an advertising man, but notably presented here without any of the satiric mockery that marks the advertising world in *Design for Living* and *Trouble in Paradise*. Dietrich's Madeleine de Beaupré is only apparently upper class since she is a jewel thief, but because no other class is revealed, no reversal as there is with Lily in *Trouble in Paradise*, her appearance as upper class is as good as a reality, and her behavior is typically aristocratic, at least as screwball comedy saw aristocratic: independent, irresponsible, and entirely out for herself. The intensity of Tom's love for Madeleine paradoxically elevates her by bringing her down in class as she herself discovers feelings that thirties audiences had begun to suspect did not exist behind Dietrich's frosty mask. The middle class is destined to win even against thieves because it has all the best and most human virtues on its side: respectability, honesty, hard work and, what finally marks the film as more Borzage than Lubitsch, a belief in the redemptive power of romantic love. Tom saves Madeleine from her own aristocratic pretensions which, far from being a value in themselves as they are in earlier Lubitsch, have become something of a decoy, a self-destructive denial of feeling.

The strongest condemnation of the upper classes in *Desire* is its denial of any real feeling to them. Effie Tilsbury's Aunt Olga, the third member of the thieving trio, is momentarily redeemed by her deep-felt remembrance of a past experience that mirrors Madeleine's with Tom. But she made the wrong decision, choosing her high life over redemptive love, and the film simply dismisses her as mean-spirited as well as something of a tippler. Similarly, the Carlos of John Halliday, Madeleine's partner in crime and potentially in love as well, is denied in Borzage's direction any real feeling for her so that the possibility of an equilateral triangle like the one in *Trouble in Paradise* is denied as well. Rather, the whole pull of the drama is toward the union of Madeleine with Tom, and Carlos is placed in their way more as simple obstacle than genuine alternative. As Borzage sees a redemptive power in romantic love, the triangle can have no meaning for him, as it always had for Lubitsch. But it is also because of the direction that comedy had taken at the time that the aristocratic partner cannot be considered a reasonable option for the heroine: her salvation has to be with Tom as it has to be with middle-class respectability.

As if to complement Roosevelt's stepped-up attacks on big business in the late thirties, most screwball comedies of the period presented an insistent anti-rich theme, sometimes submerged, sometimes overt, but present in some form. How much of a reflex reaction this had become can be most clearly see in Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth* (1937), a typically screwball mixture of the drawing room with slapstick, because the film apparently moves in the world of the carefree rich where the only real problem confronting Irene Dunne and Cary Grant is how, once separated, they will get back together again. In spite of the apparent wealth of the lead characters, jokes are repeatedly made about the wealth of Ralph Bellamy and Molly Lamont, the respective fiancés of Dunne and Grant, and the penultimate scene of the film is a typically screwball send-up of the super-rich that is presented as a class conflict when Dunne offends Grant's prospective in-laws by presenting herself as his sister: vulgar in dress and manner, with a taste for hard liquor and given to bumps and grinds when she dances.

Lubitsch might have set *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* apart from *My Man Godfrey*, but its attitudes toward the rich are close to those of the earlier film, only with the sexes of the wealthy characters reversed. In the context of his previous films, *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* presents a striking shift in attitude for Lubitsch by presenting Gary Cooper's promiscuity as a pyschological sickness so severe that it eventually lands him in an insane asylum, but even more that it is a sickness which may be attributed to his wealth. He is forcibly cured of it by financially practical Claudette Colbert, whose middle-class virtue is established with the opening scene which presents her as a wise shopper with a sharp eye for a bargain. Like William Powell's butler in *My Man Godfrey*, Colbert is a member of the upper classes who has fallen on hard times and become a better person for it.

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Although written alongside *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, *Angel*, which was produced first, took place unquestioningly and for the most part uncritically in the rarefied atmosphere of the rich and the noble, and it was condemned at the time at least in part for that reason. While all the critics remained respectful of Lubitsch as a master of the medium, the film garnered the most consistently negative set of reviews of any Lubitsch talkie. William Boehnel, one of the few favorable to the film, offered in an attempt to explain why he termed the film "ninety minutes of moderate diversion" the most astute explanation for the film's critical failure, and possibly its commercial failure as well:

> I say "moderate diversion" advisedly, because I have a suspicion that after the madcap comedy that has been so popular with audiences lately, the suaver nuances of Mr. Lubitsch's brittle little comedy drama may seem quite tame. After all, there isn't one minute of slapstick in it, only the rapier-like thrusts of smooth dialogue and the politely amorous situation in which the characters find themselves. (*New York World Telegram*, November 4, 1937)

Although most reaction was negative, there was an odd division in the way opinion was presented. Those critics who liked the film tended to regard it *solely* as comedy, "told with sly, puckish humor" (*New York Sun*, November 4, 1937). Those who did not complained that it was all fairly familiar drama told in an overly deliberate manner, almost too well crafted, with all the famous Lubitsch touches reserved for the minor characters. The extreme difference in the way the film was regarded suggests that much of the reaction was conditioned by expectation. Unlike Capra at the time of *It Happened One Night*, Lubitsch had already been typed by critics as a comedy director, and comedy directors are supposed to make comedies, but, except for some of the broader humor with the servants, *Angel* did not fit the then dominant notion of what a comedy does.

Boehnel referred to *Angel* in the above quotation as a "comedy drama," and in its own way the film presented a more acute difficulty in classification than *It Happened One Night*, but only the reviewer for *Variety* seemed aware of this: " 'Angel' is a rich Hollywood dish that copies foreign recipes. It is Ernst Lubitsch, with Continental delight tackling a plot to his liking in a far more serious manner than is his custom . . . [it] is a drama more than it is comedy, laugh lines being restricted almost to servants" (*Variety*, September 15, 1937).

The suggestion that there is virtually no comedy in the main plot reveals a good deal about attitudes toward comedy in the period because the film actually presents a division in comic styles that mirrors the usual division in Lubitsch's characters. As the comedy among the servants tends to burlesque the characters, the comedy among the central trio tends to reveal their wit and knowingness. Furthermore, the central plot pivots on an irony that in its strong sense of unexpected coincidence is quintessentially comic: two men, who had never met each other in the past yet shared a common lover while in the army, finally meet and discover they once again have a woman in common, the wife of one man and the lover of the other. The difficulty that critics had in typing the film was not so much a matter of comic plotting or even the dialogue, which might have been too rich for the period but nonetheless does, on paper at least, recall the ironic sparkle of earlier Lubitsch comedies. Rather, the problem arose from Lubitsch's decision to direct the film in a *Kammerspiel* style that by its very underplaying mutes the comedy and relies for its dramatic interest on the subtle interplay of emotion among the three major characters. While *Angel* does present some changes in Lubitsch's style that are a reflection of his period, which I will discuss shortly, by its more apparent divergencies from the dominant comic style of the time it reveals changes in Lubitsch that are of a more personal nature.

The approach that Lubitsch takes here is not really dictated by the material itself; the source play, *Angel* by Melchior Lengyel, is more clearly comedy, complete with ironic reversals both neater and more obvious in a manner that is not unlike the earlier Lubitsch comedies. The play presents a variant of the Messalina tale, adding to the whorish wife a philandering husband, with neither husband nor wife realizing their complementary sexual desires could more easily be satisfied by one another. Both husband and wife have theories of love that finally prove to be their undoing. The husband believes the only way a marriage can work is through a "certain physical reticence" on his part because "too passionate a beginning is usually followed by a slow disillusionment."* The wife, who intermittently presents herself at a Paris brothel-cum-hotel as "Angel," the mystery woman who spends one night with a stranger, then disappears, has her own theory: the only way to maintain the excitement and attraction of a love affair is to have it last no more than one night. The plot complications arrive in the figure of Scott, who is transformed into Tony (Melvyn Douglas) in the film. Scott first meets Angel in Paris, then later discovers her in England as the wife of one of his oldest and dearest friends.

The suggestion reiterated throughout the play that husband and wife are closer to each other than they realize never allows Scott to be a particularly great threat to the marriage. Once the husband learns about "Angel," his discovery turns his marriage into a love affair, while her discovery about his promiscuous sexuality turns her love affairs into a marriage. In the play the triangle is more or less a plot convenience, a means of making the husband realize the exact nature of his marriage. On the basis of past Lubitsch films, a more balanced triangle might be expected, and that is what happens here. But as Lubitsch makes the nature of the options open to the wife

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*Lengyel, *Angel*, adapted by Worthington Minor (1932). A typescript of the play is on deposit in the Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, New York.

more uncertain than he had in the past, he increases the ambiguous nature of her choice and mutes the ironic reversals of the play.

Toward the beginning of *Angel* there is a complex tracking shot along the façade of a building that recalls the exterior shots that I have discussed from *Trouble in Paradise, Design for Living,* and *The Merry Widow.* I would like to look closely at this shot because it is the last time in his career that Lubitsch would use what up to this point was a familiar figure of style for him, but also because its use here differs from the earlier films in a way that provides a key to the film's method.

The shot introduces the salon of the Grand Duchess Anna in an elaborate tracking movement across a façade that follows from the outside through a series of windows the progress of the Grand Duchess on the inside through a series of rooms, revealing in the process a kind of escalating progression of disclosed meanings on the various activities in the house: the Grand Duchess in an empty room with a valet apparently instructing him in matters of housework such as cleaning empty ashtrays; then to another window and another room where gaming tables can now be seen in the background as a woman in the foreground shows off a large-stone ring to the Grand Duchess; in the next window and next room the Grand Duchess authorizes that a check be made out to the woman for the ring; finally on to two more windows and rooms, the last one of which is a bar where the Grand Duchess arranges a meeting between a man and a woman.

It is the *sequence* of events here that helps to determine their meaning, or rather sets of meanings, for our view of the events keeps changing somewhat as our view of the Grand Duchess herself is continually being modified. The first view of simple domestic activity is given a different implication with the second view of gambling as the home becomes a casino and the housekeeper becomes perhaps a manager. When the woman approaches the Grand Duchess to show off her ring, the Grand Duchess is simply a friend joining the other woman in admiration of her possession, but as they both move into the next window, our understanding of them is modified: this elegantly dressed-up woman is hard-up for cash, asking not that the ring be admired but rather appraised. And the Grand Duchess, as she

okays a check for the ring, is not only the proprietress of this establishment, but a shrewd woman who can judge the value of a piece of jewelry with just a glance. In the next window a man comes up and greets the Grand Duchess, also apparently with a request, perhaps, on the basis of what has already been shown, also for money. The answer comes as the camera moves onto the next window and reveals a bar before which a woman stands powdering her nose; as she puts the powder away in her handbag and looks up, the Grand Duchess and the man enter from the left, the Grand Duchess introducing the man and woman. What first appeared as a request for money has been transformed into a request for an assignation.

In some ways these reversals of perception echo the reversals of *Trouble in Paradise,* but in the earlier film the reversals pivoted on oppositions while here they are as gradual, fluid, and endowed with a constantly shifting quality as the camera itself. Each new view does not really offer an opposition to the preceding one so much as a modification through a variant interpretation. For example, the underlying financial nature of the assignation presented in the final view is suggested by the initial impression that the man was asking the Grand Duchess for money. The distinctions here are as finely graded and at times as barely perceptible as the varying shades of white that fill the white-on-white interiors of the Grand Duchess' rooms.

As these reversals become gradual and noncontradicting, the sense of surprise that was a key element of Lubitsch's style necessarily becomes muted. Furthermore, the strong opposition between public and private worlds that the façade shots always suggested in previous films has undergone a change here as the external view of an event takes on as much validity as a private view and offers its own compelling meaning. Lubitsch's characters are now less set apart from their society and will increasingly be seen at once in private and social dimensions.

Andrew Sarris has invoked Luigi Pirandello in connection with *Angel,* noting that "Lubitsch taught the American cinema the importance of appearance for appearance's sake" (p. 67). The connection to Pirandello is most obvious with *Angel* because of thematic material which strongly relates to two dominant Pirandello themes of the relativity of truth and the mystery of identity and also a stylistic method that keeps the audience as much in the dark as characters within the work. For all the familiarity of the narrative material in *Angel* that critics complained of, Lubitsch's approach to his material is in some ways even more experimental than the most experimental of Pirandello's plays, for the author's point-of-view is muted here in a way that it never is in Pirandello's work.

Pirandello's plays might deal with the ambiguity of appearance, but the author's voice is itself always definite on the nature of ambiguity. In Pirandello the meaning of the drama is articulated with a precision and clarity that at times approaches the didactic, so that no matter how confusing appearances might become, the audience is never left in the dark on how to perceive these confusions. There is frequently one character in a Pirandello play who, from the beginning, acts as a kind of guide to direct the audience's attitudes on the proceedings: the Father in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Laudisi in *Right You Are! (If You Think You Are)*, Henry IV himself in *Henry IV*, and Diego in *Each in His Own Way*. Pirandello, then, generally provides a character with whom the audience can identify and for whose theories the plays act as demonstrations. There is always at least one person who sees the truth, although the truth is that all truth is relative. *Angel*, on the other hand, provides no such truth-seeker, and for this reason the drama unfolds in a much more nebulous atmosphere than even a Pirandello play: the coordinates of reality always seem to be slipping from the grasp of the spectator.

Much of the ambiguity about character in the film derives from the *Kammerspiel* style Lubitsch uses here. Much like chamber music, no one part in the film is allowed to dominate, no one voice controls our perceptions. Each character finds definition not just by himself, by his own actions, but by the way the other two characters see him, and the other two never see the third in exactly the same light. This multiple aspect of character is of course clearest with Maria/Angel because she has two names, each depending on who is talking to her, but the men are no less divided. Seen by husband Frederick (Herbert Marshall), lover Tony (Melvyn Douglas) is a man overwhelmed by a passion that threatens his future. Seen by Maria (Marlene Dietrich), Tony embodies an overwhelming passion that threatens *her* future. Seen by Maria, Frederick is being crushed by his devotion to work with only the memory of a romantic past left to him as a possible redemption for the future. Seen by Tony, Frederick's greatest achievement is in his devotion to his work.

This scheme of multiple points of view becomes even more complex through the unfolding of the plot as each character learns to see another through the eyes of the third, but never entirely the way the third sees. Tony's discovery that Angel/Maria is Frederick's wife, for example, makes him see Frederick in a new way: stuffy, cold, smug and, because of these qualities (which are not entirely off the mark), a man who could hardly keep a woman like Maria. Yet this is only part of what Maria herself sees in Frederick, and because Tony cannot see the rest, he can never understand why she simply does not leave her husband. With the multiple and ambiguous realities of *Angel*, Lubitsch's style has moved decisively away from its sharp penetration of surfaces to a feeling of inaccessibility, the impression that the camera, even in its oblique fashion, cannot see everything. The greater sense of privacy the camera renders in this film, the impenetrability, gives the characters' emotions a mysterious quality that will develop through the later films and endow them with their greater emotional weight.

As *Angel* took Lubitsch's point of view in a new direction, it brought with it changes in style that may be regarded partly as internal development, partly as response to the more naturalistic, character-oriented style that dominated Hollywood films in the thirties. Whatever the reasons, *Angel* presents in its set design and shooting style a number of important differences in the look of a Lubitsch film, differences that will be developed in subsequent works. As befits the upper-class environment, the sets themselves are still voluminous and impressively luxurious, yet not as impressive in themselves as the sets in the earlier Lubitsch films had been. *Lady Windermere's Fan* presents the sharpest contrast with *Angel* because both films take place among the English aristocracy, which leads to a surface similarity in set design: high-ceilinged rooms that seem to stretch on indefinitely, an abundance of solid wood trim and paneling, heavy plaster walls, stone arches, fireplaces in practically every room.

In both films, sets convey a sense of weightiness and solidity that is distinctively English, yet in *Lady Windermere's Fan* all this heaviness finally produces a lighter effect than in *Angel* because the sets in the earlier film place a greater emphasis on empty spaces and sweeping lines, with relatively little furniture to break up the openness of the cavernous rooms. Luxury is conveyed not through an abundance of furnishings, but through their exquisite appropriateness. Finally, the lighting in *Lady Windermere's Fan* is generally flat and high key to keep the space open and endowed with a free airiness. By contrast, the set design in *Angel* with its greater emphasis on wood, abundance of furniture to break up and order the open space, and the generally darker light project a more lived-in, cozier quality.

For all the greater nauralism of set design in *Angel*, the sets do retain something of the metaphorical quality that is Lubitsch's. The film may in fact be seen to center on the opposition between two settings much as *Trouble in Paradise* makes a meaningful contrast between the Venice Grand Hotel and Mariette's luxury mansion: Sir Frederick's English manor which dominates the central portion of the film is placed against the Grand Duchess' Parisian salon, which opens and closes the film. Where the manor is dominated by darker tones of wood, curtained walls, and dark-cushioned, overstuffed furniture that create a paradoxical ambience of security and restriction, the Parisian salon is almost entirely white-on-white and photographed with a bright, even light to create an atmosphere of both indefiniteness and freedom.

Nevertheless, where the force of the sets in *Trouble in Paradise* was chiefly metaphorical, here the sets assert a primary reality in themselves: because of the scaled-down quality that comes from breaking up the open spaces in *Angel*, it is simply easier to imagine someone living in Sir Frederick's manor. As characters fit more comfortably into settings, an increasing emotional intimacy between audience and character emerges in these later Lubitsch films. Character will never fully dominate setting, but beginning with *Angel* character is given more of a parity with setting.

Metaphors may still be found in *Angel*, but they are presented in a manner quite different from the earlier films. Where in the past the director's intelligence alone directed our attention toward certain objects and, in the process, endowed them with a significance beyond their apparent function, in *Angel* similar metaphors are presented with a kind of realistic justification that moves Lubitsch's style into the naturalistic mode that dominated films in this period. The entire dinner scene, for example, and the complex emotional interaction between the three main characters is shown solely through the plates of food for each character. The plates are seen, however, not because an ever-present author chooses to show them to us as might occur in earlier Lubitsch, but rather because the servants themselves are looking at the plates of uneaten and half-eaten veal and trying to discover the significance of the owner's eating habits. The plates operate metaphorically, as they might have in other Lubitsch films, but they do so first of all because *the characters within the film* perceive them metaphorically.

The importance of metaphor in this particular scene is that it establishes different ways of seeing the same thing: if the servants conclude that the plates must mean Tony does not like veal, the viewer concludes something quite different. It is in this scene that Lubitsch comes closest to the direct ironic reversals of the earlier films by the stark opposition of ours and the servants' understanding of the plates, and this is possibly why critics at the time saw the scenes with the servants as being the only ones to contain Lubitsch touches. Nevertheless, even as we are given reactors to events and characters throughout that help place the metaphors, the oppositions in the rest of the film are by no means so simple. For example, when Tony, just having purchased some flowers for Maria, discovers that Maria has run off, the camera lingers on the sad and expectant-looking flower seller. When it becomes clear from the sound-track that the offscreen Tony has lost Maria, the flower seller first seems to sigh, then slowly walks over to the park bench where Tony had dropped the flowers purchased for Maria. From the generally sad appearance of the flower seller it is reasonable to conclude that she sees the abandoned flowers as an expression of Tony's feelings in losing Maria. But, after a brief glance, she picks up the flowers, dusts them off and replaces them in her tray to sell again.

That calculation should follow sympathy does not deny the emotional force of the flowers themselves. Lubitsch's camera lingers on the flower seller to make the point that it is possible to be both calculating and emotionally engaged at the same time. In retrospect this must influence the way we see Maria in her relations with Tony, so that any degree of calculation we subsequently attach to her behavior with him should not deny the genuineness of her feelings. As *Angel* posits an opposition of feeling and reason that is not really an opposition, as the gradations in seemingly distinct categories grow more refined and subtle, this film presents a clear movement away from the dialectical sensibility that reached its fullest flowering in *The Merry Widow*.

In complement to the weakening metaphorical impact of style in *Angel*, thematic concerns are presented with an unusual degree of verbal explicitness. For example, Frederick and Tony precisely define themselves, their differing views and, unconsciously, the different attractions each holds for Maria/Angel as they talk about love.

FREDERICK: Believe me, Halton, a man shouldn't go out of his way to create handicaps for himself.

TONY: I imagine that's exactly what Brutus told Caesar when Caesar said, "Brutus, I just met a little Egyptian girl by the name of Cleopatra—and she's driving me crazy."

FREDERICK: Well—if I remember my history correctly, Caesar got over it, didn't he?

TONY: Right. But my dear man, Cleopatra was not Angel. If Caesar even had met Angel, it would have changed the history of the Roman Empire.

FREDERICK: Yes—it would probably have collapsed two hundred years earlier.

TONY: What are two hundred years in history? —twenty-five pages. But one hour with Angel . . .

FREDERICK: Sixty minutes.

TONY: No—three thousand six hundred seconds.

FREDERICK: Well, I give up. It's always ridiculous to reason with a man in love—and I'm afraid you *are* a man in love.

TONY: I don't know. It may be more than love or less than love.

FREDERICK: Well, man, make up your mind—what is it?

This is the most direct statement of the Lubitschean conflict that has its clearest antecedents in *Trouble in Paradise* and *The Merry Widow*, although all the films centered on triangles at least suggest a similar notion: the intensity of feeling that can turn a minute into an eternity contrasted with the quieter feelings of day-to-day living that can burn slowly through an actual lifetime. This opposition was worked out chiefly through images in the earlier films, from the visual emphasis on clocks in *Trouble in Paradise* to the brilliant oppositions of black and white, stasis and movement in *The Merry Widow*. In *Angel* there are no visual equivalents for these ideas, no metaphorical juxtaposition established by the images, but rather a dramatically direct and simple verbal exposition of the conflict. This directness, however, actually weakens the impact of the opposition. Where the dialectical style of the earlier films itself supported the oppositions, in effect putting the weight of the author's voice behind the contrasts, in *Angel* it is the characters themselves who argue a dialectic that the style of the film partly undercuts.

Much as Lubitsch is moving in *Angel* toward the more functional dramatic visual style typical of the period with the lessening metaphoric density of his images, his cutting patterns even in dialogue scenes remain just unconventional enough to keep the audiences off-balance and create a way of looking at the emotional exchange of a scene that would not be apparent from the printed dialogue. For example, when Tony makes clear to Angel in their first meeting at the Grand Duchess' salon that his interest in Paris lies elsewhere than in such famous landmarks as the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame, the following conversation ensues:

ANGEL/MARIA: How stupid of me! You want me to arrange a party for you—a nice large party.

TONY: Not too large.

ANGEL/MARIA: Six?

(no response from Tony)

ANGEL/MARIA: Four?

(still no response)

ANGEL/MARIA: Two?

(Tony slowly breaks into an affirmative smile)

The conventional way of shooting this scene in the thirties would be either a two-shot to reveal the interaction of the two characters, which interaction would then be the dramatic point of the scene, or cross-cutting to provide a comic accent to the dialogue through reaction shots of Tony after each of Maria's suggestions, for the size of the party. Lubitsch does neither. Instead, during Maria's offscreen countdown, the camera remains exclusively on a single of Tony. Since Maria has let Tony think she is the Grand Duchess here, it is clear that she is playing with him. From the exclusive focus on Tony during this exchange, however, the resulting continuity of Tony's response makes it seem that he is playing with Maria as well: since the camera shows nothing else, it is his very lack of response forcing her countdown that becomes the focus of the dialogue. By keeping them apart at this moment and singling out Tony's behavior as a complement to Maria's, Lubitsch's camera has established a greater empathy between the two than placing them physically together in the same shot might have.

Lubitsch's camera continues to be highly selective, but in a much quieter way than in the earlier films. A dramatic tension is maintained through the unpredictability of the camera so that we can never quite be certain how the scene will be shot even if we are certain of the activity of the scene. But the unpredictability has become less pronounced than in the earlier films and limits itself chiefly to unexpected points of view so that, for example, this and later films contain far fewer of the spatial surprises that give the earlier films their stylistic liveliness.

The difference might be most clearly defined by one of the surprises in the film that is worked by an oddly disorienting cut. The scene is of Sir Frederick's return home after we are first introduced to him. He walks into his wife's bedroom only to discover that she is not asleep in her bed: this action is seen through a mirror at one end of the room so that it all appears as if in long shot. As Frederick continues looking at the bed, Lubitsch cuts to the scene in actuality at approximately the same distance as the view through the mirror: the cut has something of the effect of a reverse angle, yet the view is identical with that in the mirror. The movement from mirror to actuality has none of the abrupt sense of revelation that the spatial surprises in the earlier films carry. Rather, as the spaces remain whole within each shot, with neither shot revealing more of the scene than the other, there is a disquieting sense of disorientation in movement from mirror to actuality so that neither one can be made to seem more "real" or revealing than the other. Much as the mirror and the actuality are different, the resulting mise-en-scène in the two shots is too similar to present a polar opposition.

As the spatial surprises have grown muted, the acting style in *Angel* is unusually quiet for Lubitsch. It is this aspect of the film more than any other that most displeased the critics; Frank Nugent, for example, complained that Herbert Marshall played his part "with a dignity uncommon to cuckolds" (*New York Times*, November 4, 1937). Especially in comparison to the livelier, more emotionally direct playing style of the period, the emotions of these characters had to seem subterranean to critics of the time. Lubitsch's characters often did conceal their emotions in any case, but in the past this was made up for by the extravagant elegance of surface that created sufficient vitality in itself to suggest a range of emotions under "the frozen-faced heights" which Archer Winsten thought the cast of *Angel* achieved (*New York Post*, November 4, 1937).

The change in performance in *Angel* may be attributed to Lubitsch's response to his material, an attempt to render all distinctions of the film in grey tones rather than in the crisp black-white oppositions of the earlier films. In Lubitsch's *Kammerspiel* style the greatest dramatic tension may be achieved by the smallest nuance of expression while the slightest gestures may produce the most meaning. Consider, for example, the following scene between Maria and Tony: they have dined together, presumably, as far as the Code would allow such presumption, have slept together and are now approaching the moment when they must say goodbye.

TONY: You're cold.
ANGEL/MARIA: Frightened.
TONY: Of me?

ANGEL/MARIA: Much more serious. I am frightened of myself. What a strange evening. I dined with you to be amused, to laugh—to laugh at you—and . . .
TONY: And what?
ANGEL/MARIA: To say goodbye.

When Maria says she is frightened of herself, she does not look at Tony, so she says it more to herself than to him, and the barest flicker of a smile plays on her lips. Outwardly the smile becomes a means of distancing herself from him, denying him access to her feelings even as she verbally reveals them. But the slightness of the smile really makes it more for herself than for him as it signals her own ironic and disturbing detachment from what is happening to her: she becomes simultaneously spectator and performer, with the smile in no way denying the validity of the emotion, but coloring it, giving it a tension and complexity. When she continues to talk of her desire for amusement, she talks directly to Tony and the smile broadens. The smile is now directed toward him, a means of cutting him off, and the play between irony and feeling at the beginning of her remarks now gives way solely to irony, just as the irony is about to give way in the exchange that follows this solely to feeling. Far from being emotionless, the actors present a complex play of shifting feelings, but in tones that are too unaccented for the period.

Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo were regarded as rivals in the thirties inasmuch as each had a face of cold, sculptural beauty that suggested an impenetrability and inaccessibility. Dietrich's role in *Desire* had been conceived by Lubitsch as a way of humanizing her screen persona. A similar attempt would be made subsequently in *Ninotchka* to humanize Garbo, but Garbo projected a more self-sufficient quality than Dietrich. Behind Dietrich's mask was a vulnerability that was always fully exploited by Josef von Sternberg: she could never be as fully independent as she tried to be for her emotions always denied the extreme self-control she apparently wanted to possess. Because of this inner softness, Dietrich could revitalize her career in the forties (as Garbo could not) by becoming less aloof as she first did with *Destry Rides Again* (1939).

What appeared to be aloofness in Dietrich really stemmed from a feeling that was more directed against herself than against the rest of the world: it was a defensiveness against the tyranny of her own feelings. For this reason, Dietrich's screen character is usually ironic about herself and, at times, even self-mocking. As revealed with the intricate play of smiles in the scene described above, Lubitsch fully realized the defensive aspect of her personality and emphasized it by a performance that conveys its complexity through an extraordinarily wide range of differently nuanced smiles. When Dietrich smiles in *Angel*, the resulting expression is no simple matter, for each smile creates a different set of meanings.

The delicately nuanced performing style that dominates this film necessarily conveys an atmosphere of uncertainty as levels of perception, one character's understanding of another as well as our understanding of all, are constantly, slowly shifting. How much Lubitsch was responding to the screwball films of the time and yet setting himself apart from them by this very ambiguity of his style may be seen in his treatment of the Grand Duchess. This aristocratic lady who is the madam of a high-class brothel, the Grand Duchess presents an inversion between class and professional activity that should mark her as a screwball character, yet she never reveals herself as anything less than the Grand Duchess she was born. Consider, for example, the brief scene when Tony, after his first meeting with Angel, tries to find out more about the mystery woman from the Grand Duchess:

TONY: . . . tell me the name of that lady that was in the room a moment ago.
GRAND DUCHESS: Lady?—I don't know. Was there a lady here?
TONY: Come, come, You know there was.
GRAND DUCHESS: Really I don't know. I swear.

The line readings of Laura Hope Crews here are almost more important than the lines of the Grand Duchess in themselves for she speaks with an honesty and sincerity, a convincing sense of propriety that does not suggest even the possibility of an ironic toying with Tony. There is neither a trace of discomfort nor any apparent attempt to be convincing that itself would give the lie to the conviction: she says "I swear" in a completely nonemphatic way that makes the oath appear all the more forthright for its lack of emphasis. Yet her assertion here must seem to contradict the few "facts" already given about her: from the very first shot she is presented as a woman who has complete control over everything that happens in her establishment, and she herself had shown Maria into the room where Tony was waiting. In the context of late thrities comedy, the Grand Duchess must be seen in outline at least as a comic character, yet she has not been realized in a way that adhered to the prevalent comic norms. Given the genre assumptions of the period, it must have been particularly exasperating for a thirties audience that the Grand Duchess always acts *in social type* as an aristocrat with no sign of pretense and no indication that she is not what she seems. The inversion of character type that was so much a feature of screwball comedy depended on a sharp sense of opposition that Lubitsch's style could no longer accommodate.

Angel begins with a joke about concealed identity, and much of the rest of the film is concerned with how we perceive another's identity, how much we impose from preconception, how much we penetrate to another's emotions from an empathy that might be more willed than real. In their differing ways, both Frederick and Tony are primarily concerned with learning about Maria's past in order to understand her present identity, as if that which cannot be seen or directly experienced might nonetheless explain a present-tense experience. The audience itself is partly encouraged to take the same approach as the first extended dialogue sequence with Maria defines her in terms of her past.

GRAND DUCHESS: Why didn't you write to me? You know I like to keep track of all my friends.
MARIA (*smiling*): That's why I didn't write to you.
GRAND DUCHESS: Oh. Sit down . . . Now, come, you must tell me everything. How's Rome?
MARIA: I haven't been there for years.
GRAND DUCHESS: Did your husband get transferred?
MARIA: Husband? . . . Oh, you mean Savoldi. I didn't marry him. I broke the engagement.
GRAND DUCHESS: Why?
MARIA: I've forgotten.

GRAND DUCHESS: What are you doing now?
MARIA: At the moment I'm in Paris. But, by the way, I'm not in Paris. I can trust you?
GRAND DUCHESS: I swear.

This is very slim evidence to build a biography on as there are only a few certainties. There is enough of a connection between the Grand Duchess and Maria in the past for the Grand Duchess to assume a level of intimacy with Maria in talking about past loves, and while Maria clearly keeps her distance, she also seems to feel close enough to the Grand Duchess to trust her with discreet matters. Also, we learn of her engagement to an Italian diplomat, but this fact opens up more ambiguities about her character than any true certainties. The Italian diplomat at the least suggests that she has had a consistent taste in the men she has been drawn to, but he also points to the possibility of her as an adventuress, her marriage to Frederick as an act of opportunism.

Implicit in the differing identities that Maria holds for the different characters who see her is the suggestion that personality is a function of the social grid through which it is perceived. A large part of Frederick's shock in discovering Maria at the Grand Duchess' in the final scene comes not so much from the realization of her affair with Tony as the sudden understanding of what she must have been in the past to have frequented this salon:

FREDERICK: Maria, how many times have you been here before? . . . What kind of life have you been leading? What kind of woman are you? . . . How many times have you been here? Answer me, tell me— . . . To think that my wife whom I trusted, whom I was proud of, to think that you could come to a place like this!

As the discrete worlds of public and private experience, of appearance and reality, are presented in *Angel* without the stark oppositions typical of the earlier work, the fine web of preconceptions through which the characters view one another is given a social determinant: character and perception of character are dependent upon the social context in which they exist. *Angel* has moved decisively away from the oppositions of the earlier films which, in setting an individual's desires against social necessity, implied an absolute personality outside of social context. At root, kings and queens were no different from the rest of us. In *Angel* character necessarily changes as context changes, as each character becomes in part what the other person sees in him or her. To the extent that Lubitsch challenges his male characters here, he is also challenging his own past views.

Herbert Marshall's Sir Frederick by virtue of casting recalls Marshall's Gaston in *Trouble in Paradise,* but the style of the film does not support Frederick as style had supported Gaston. Like Gaston, Frederick has a matter-of-fact sensibility that enables him to penetrate the most opaque surfaces with his wit. In the debate on love between Tony and Frederick, Frederick provides a continuously flowing cold shower to Tony's amorous ardor. If this conversation were regarded as a simple debate on the nature of love, Tony certainly manages to score a few points over Frederick with his "three thousand six hundred seconds," but Frederick strikes back effectively when Tony finds it impossible to say exactly what his feelings are. Frederick the eminent diplomat and political rationalist must have a word for everything and can make Tony's feelings suspect as vague schoolboy yearnings simply because they cannot be defined. In *Trouble in Paradise* the style which constantly penetrates to the essence of an action in effect sides with Gaston's ability to see beyond every surface, but in *Angel* this surface world itself has become so muddied as to give weight to Tony's sense of mystery and suggest thereby the limitations to Frederick's smug confidence in his own perceptions of the world.

Translated into social terms, Frederick's smugness becomes a snobbishness, an absolute confidence in the superiority of his social position. One of the sharpest ironies in the film occurs when Frederick meets the Grand Duchess and acts in an unrelievedly haughty manner with her, a slight trace of disgust coloring his speech. The Grand Duchess answers him with her usual elegance and graciousness, and in so doing effectively undercuts his sense of superiority by projecting a quiet confidence in her own social position. Playing social smugness off against social smugness, Lubitsch is tentatively moving into the dominant strain of thirties comedy with a more critical view of the upper classes, but a criticism that is brought off in a quiet and ambiguous fashion that is unusual for the period.

If critics at the time thought most of the comedy in *Angel* was reserved for the servants, they ignored a comedy that by contagion affects our view of the leading characters. A scene with Wilton the butler oddly foreshadows a later scene with Sir Frederick, oddly because while the first is played for comedy and the second is not, it is impossible to view the second without remembering the comic point of the first. When Wilton takes his fiancée to the Ascot races, he is clearly pleased to be able to show off his importance both by pointing to all the other servants he knows at the same time that he is seen with an attractive woman. In a later scene at the opera, Frederick almost imitates Wilton's behavior as he expresses delight in the attention that Maria is attracting:

> FREDERICK: Everybody seems to have turned out tonight. Hello. . . . And everybody seems to be looking at us—at you, rather. . . . They certainly are looking at you! You know, a man shouldn't take a woman seriously unless he can be proud of her. At least she should be fit to sit at the head of his table . . .

The ordering of scenes is important here, for once this kind of possessive snobbishness with which a man treats a woman has been presented comically, its dramatic rendering is in effect undercut in advance. Similarly, Wilton's breaking off his engagement because he discovers that his fiancée dances the rumba is a comic foreshadowing of Frederick's shocked discovery that Maria is not in fact a lady, or at least part of her does not conform to his notion of what a lady should be. As the film challenges the clarity with which Frederick sees Maria, it undermines by extension the clarity with which he views himself and his station in society.

Maria's challenge to Frederick at the end of the film operates not so much to revitalize their marriage as to cause Frederick to understand the limitations of his perception. Frederick has arrived at the Grand Duchess' to determine if his worst suspicions concerning Maria and Angel are true. Maria suddenly appears and tells him that she too has come to see Angel, has in fact already done so. Angel is in the next room, she tells him, and then challenges him to accept this claim on faith alone.

> MARIA: Now, Frederick, if you go into that room, I'm afraid our marriage is over. If you find Angel in there, you will be happy that I'm not Angel, and you'll want to continue our old life. That would not be satisfactory to me.
>
> FREDERICK: And if I don't find Angel?
>
> MARIA: In that case, I think you'll want to see your lawyer as soon as possible. On the other hand, if you don't go in at all, you will be a little uncertain. You won't be so sure of yourself—or of me. And that might be wonderful.

Richard Corliss' complaint that Frederick should not have entered the room misses the point of both the character and the film itself. Given the character that has been established up to this point of the film, it is impossible that he should not enter the room. With a supreme, smug confidence in the rational mind to find clarity in all aspects of life, both political and personal, he cannot passively accept the possibility of mystery. The final irony of the film, however, is that Frederick's attempt to find clarity only brings him in closer confrontation with an impenetrable mystery. In a long shot that reveals all the empty space and possible evidence around him, Frederick stands helplessly in the empty room that is supposed to contain Angel. The tangible evidence he seeks is in fact invisible, a nothingness that says, "Yes, Maria is Angel." Yet even as the empty room answers his foremost question, it raises a host of others that are left unresolved; clarity turns into uncertainty, and Frederick is left with no more knowledge of who Angel is than Tony possesses.

For all that Tony in his debate on love with Frederick claims to accept a sense of mystery and indefiniteness in life, he is nonetheless allied with Frederick in the smug confidence of his own perceptions. From his very first meeting with Angel, which begins with some comedy built around mistaken identity, he seeks to penetrate through the outward appearance as if there were something more for him to know, a point that Angel/Maria herself disputes from the start.

> TONY: Who are you? I must know.
>
> MARIA: Isn't it obvious?
>
> TONY: Not to me.
>
> MARIA: You meet me at the house of the Grand Duchess—
>
> TONY: What were you doing there?
>
> MARIA: —you meet me at five o'clock and at ten minutes past five I agree to dine with you, a complete stranger. The shortest story in the world.

Tony's questions in the opening scenes of the film anticipate Frederick's at the end, but answers here as at the end would make little difference. In finally discovering Angel's "true" identity as Lady Barker, he in effect refuses to recognize it and confidently calls her "Angel" the moment they are alone together as if to possess her by limiting her actual identity to his perception of her.

While *Angel* moves to a more critical view of the rich than the earlier Lubitsch films, there is none of the complementary assumption about middle-class superiority that was so typical of the period. Something of a class conflict does play itself out in *Angel*, but not in an obvious way since it has to do with a matter of casting. Tony is nominally English and almost as upper-crust as Sir Frederick, but in casting Melvyn Douglas in the part opposite Marshall, Lubitsch has made the character more American middle class. Throughout his career Lubitsch remained sharply attuned to peculiarities of casting and how they might affect audience understanding of a character. *The Love Parade* has an elaborate joke to explain Maurice Chevalier's French accent, but in all the musicals even where no explanation is offered the point of casting Chevalier is that, no matter what nationality the screenplay may assign to him, he is always the quintessential Frenchman. Similarly, the casting of Jennifer Jones as the Cockney parlor maid in *Cluny Brown*, which otherwise features a largely British cast, makes sense with its intimations of a brash American innocence unattuned to the niceties of the British class structure.

Viewing Tony as he is incarnated by Douglas brings *Angel* somewhat closer to the pattern of *Desire*, in that the exoticism of continental, cold, and controlled Dietrich might possibly be made more human by the middle-class virtue of Douglas as he awakens an emotional life in her that her upper-class existence seems to deny. Tony's attitude is as much class-determined as Frederick's, for he confidently assumes that his one night with Angel will naturally lead her to leave her husband and become a respectable woman by marrying him. She herself later remarks quite pointedly to Tony that she never told him she loved him, yet love is the only thing he can interpret from her actions because of the conventionality of his sensibility. From the patterns of the period, we might expect Angel/Maria to go off with middle-class Tony, but this conclusion would conflict with the Production Code strictures by renouncing marriage in favor of a love affair. The deliberately understated and tentative quality of the ending which reunites Maria with Frederick hinges on an odd conflict between consciously articulated values of a period embodied in the Production Code and underlying assumptions found in familiar plot patterns.

In Sir Frederick *Angel* presents Lubitsch's first political character in a contemporary setting. There is some limited political satire along the edges of the narrative, but it does not make the film more overtly political than earlier works. One reviewer, critical of the apparently narrow focus of the film, complained that it appealed to "the matinee trade, some reactionaries of whom seem still to feel that world affairs such [sic] be subordinated to the critical demands of the boudoir" (*New York Daily Mirror*, November 4, 1937). Actually, Lubitsch's concentration on the boudoir in no way ignores Sir Frederick's political role since his martyrlike insistence in taking all the weight of the world on his shoulders which leads to the stagnation of his marriage and his belief in rational discourse in all his relations with his wife indirectly reflect English diplomacy of the period. In an apparently peaceful breakfast scene when Maria confesses she is in love with another man and intends to run away with him, then changes the confession to a fabrication by saying she wonders what Frederick would do, he replies with eminent reasonableness: "I certainly wouldn't quarrel. It would be too late." But this reasonableness not only ignores the reality of the wife's confession, it ignores and even suppresses the husband's feelings.

Is this then the irony of a man who can persuade great nations but cannot persuade his own wife, who can put the rest of the world in order but finds his own life in shambles, or is there the suggestion as Europe approaches war of an ultimate futility in this well-reasoned approach? Great Britain had been a leading force in the League of Nations at the time, and Barker is always specifically associated with the League. But the League was also becoming increasingly impotent with the situation in Europe deteriorating: in 1936, the year before *Angel*, the Rhineland had been remilitarized and Italy conquered Ethiopia, both in opposition to the League. However abstracted by being made part of a character's behavior, a contemporary political reality could be felt in *Angel* and would become overt subsequently in *Ninotchka* and *To Be Or Not To Be*.

While Lubitsch in his return to direction became more explicitly political in subject matter like Chaplin and Capra, and while he moved, however tentatively, toward a more critical view of the rich, the tone of *Angel* set it apart from comedy of its period. Lubitsch would soon try his hand at screwball comedy with *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* and *That Uncertain Feeling* (1941), but the sprightly manner and sharp ironic reversals that the genre required, qualities that may be seen in his earlier comedies, now eluded him. In *Angel*, Lubitsch discovered a new quietness and a slower pacing that would have a marked influence on all his later films.

PART THREE

LOVE AND POLITICS

1938-1941

6

THE LITTLE PEOPLE *THE SHOP AROUND THE CORNER*

By the late thirties Lubitsch had suffered a number of major setbacks in his career: his one-year stint as production chief at Paramount had been a failure; the appointment had made a number of colleagues among directors hostile; his return to active direction, which was to supervise films starring Marlene Dietrich and Claudette Colbert, not only failed to revive Dietrich's flagging career, but produced such a major commercial failure in *Angel* that Dietrich was soon let go by Paramount. Worst of all, *Angel* marked the first time the critics had really turned against him. If Lubitsch had always been able to bolster his standing in the schizoid world of Hollywood by his critical reputation, the extremely negative reaction to *Angel* denied even that support. Lubitsch might have opposed *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* to *My Man Godfrey* by calling it "mental slapstick," but the fact that he considered it slapstick in any form indicates a desire to move back into the comedy mainstream, to prove that even in his absence from active filmmaking he had not lost touch with current trends.

While the screwballs of most screwball comedies were relatively harmless eccentrics, Lubitsch in both *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* and *That Uncertain Feeling*, the two most raucous of his later films, seems to have taken the genre name literally, to the point, in fact, of pathology. Unlike earlier Lubitsch heroes and heroines, the leading characters in both films are so lacking in *savoir faire* in handling their sex lives that they are in need of psychiatric help: the compulsive womanizing of Michael Brandon (Gary Cooper) in *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* leads him into an insane asylum where he must be straitjacketed when confronted with his ex-wife Nicole (Claudette Colbert), while the unfulfilled sex life of Jill Baker (Merle Oberon) in *That Uncertain Feeling* sends her inopportunely into public hiccoughing fits for which she must seek psychiatric help.

At first glance, a Freudian approach to character might seem the inevitable outcome for a director who throughout his career has been fascinated by discrepancies between surface and essence. But such a direct confrontation of his characters' inner lives did not so much open up Lubitsch's vision as unbalance the delicate equipoise of his style. Of all the later films, only *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* and *That Uncertain Feeling* make character so thoroughly subservient to the comic patterning of their plots: nowhere else does the comedy seem so forced, the tone so noisily uncertain, and the directorial ironies so darkly misanthropic. In the context of Lubitsch's career, both films are most interesting for their failure in that they reveal Lubitsch's inability to adopt changes in his vision to changes in American comedy: as the emotional tone of his films became heavier, Lubitsch was no longer able to carry off the breezy farce style of his earlier films.

That Uncertain Feeling contains a dinner party scene that parallels the dinner party from *Design for Living* in many ways, but with a striking realignment of sympathies. In *That Uncertain Feeling* lawyer Larry Baker (Melvyn Douglas) is having some potential clients to dinner. Because the clients are Hungarian-born, Baker has taught his wife a complimentary phrase in Hungarian to please his guests. There is some slight satire of social pretension here, but of the gentlest sort. Most of the comedy in the scene focuses on the guests' extremely generous response to their hostess' uncertain attempts to speak their native language. The potential absurdity of the situation and the exposure of silly social pretenses might have been thrown into sharper relief by the presence of an outsider, the Bohemian musician Sebastian (Burgess Meredith), who is openly romancing Mrs. Baker. This is precisely what happens in *Design for Living*, where outsiders Tom and George first destroy Max Plunkett's business party, then steal away his wife.

In *That Uncertain Feeling*, however, Sebastian is more petulant than charming, so that the main impression he leaves is that of a simple spoilsport. The casting of an edgy performer like Meredith in this role is possibly a miscalculation, but another shift from *Design for Living* in the handling of the party makes Meredith's performance congruent with the differing tone in the rest of the film. In *Design for Living* the guests that Tom and George abuse are only briefly seen at the very beginning of the sequence and then not at all during the open battle which takes place offscreen. In *That Uncertain Feeling* the guests are fully established as sympathetic characters, so that Sebastian's attack is not against the faceless representatives of a stuffy bourgeois milieu, but against some rather nice people. The effect of the comedy here is to shift sympathy away from Sebastian and load the scene entirely in Larry's favor with an unexpected—for Lubitsch, but not for the period—defense of middle-class propriety.

How much the apparent triumph of middle-class behavior in this film reflects an actual change in Lubitsch's vision or simply an accommodation to prevailing audience tastes must remain a moot point since the fact that Lubitsch was at all willing to accommodate himself to a dominant attitude might be seen to reflect a change in vision. The one real consistency here with the earlier films, and an important point to keep in mind, is that much as he moves with the rest of American screen comedy toward the middle classes in this period, he no more embraces their values than he had embraced those of the upper classes. The consistent ironies of his films, a mode of expression that takes hold even of his one straight dramatic film in the sound period, marks him as an eternal outsider. It is this sense of outsiderness, of being part of and yet never fully belonging to the dominant culture, that gives even his most sophisticated comedies of manners the quality of Jewish humor that Lotte Eisner finds in his work. By contrast, Frank Capra, Italian-born but coming to America at age three, is an outsider who has moved tenaciously to the center of his society, fully embracing its values, although with a more self-conscious awareness of their meanings than a native-born director might possess. It is revealing that *That Uncertain Feeling*, the only Lubitsch film set entirely in a contemporary middle-class American milieu, is the only film in this period where the usual Lubitsch balance between irony and sympathy is pushed in the direction of open hostility.

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As the milieu becomes more middle-class and the concerns of the characters change, the concerns of Lubitsch's films necessarily change as well. Again, *Design for Living* provides the sharpest contrast with the later films. There's some talk of poverty and hunger in the earlier film, but neither one is felt very strongly since both are finally seen as elements in a game which the lead characters play and even actively seek out at the end of the film. In *The Shop Around the Corner* money becomes a governing factor in the characters' lives in general and of their sex lives in particular. Alfred Kralik's (James Stewart) hopes of marriage are tied to his hopes of a promotion, and when he loses his job, he cannot bring himself to keep his first date with the anonymous pen pal he had been corresponding with and possibly hoped to marry. These concerns for money are of course embedded in the narrative itself, but what really sets *The Shop Around the Corner* apart from *Design for Living* is a new element in performance.

A key scene in defining the parameters of the characters' existence occurs early in the film when Klara Novak (Margaret Sullavan), after having had her application for a salesgirl job turned down by both Kralik and Mr. Matuschek (Frank Morgan), owner of the shop, manages to land the job by opportunely selling a musical cigarette box to a fat woman who mistakes it for a candy box. Klara's palming off the cigarette box as something other than what it is and then deliberately charging too much for it signals the extent of her desperation in trying to secure this job. But the most striking aspect of Margaret Sullavan's performance through this scene is its physical quality: the way she removes her hat as if to propel herself into action at the beginning of her salespitch, the sense of urgency in the breathlessness of her delivery, and the heaving-sigh collapse of her entire body when she finally makes the sale. The casting of Sullavan is effective because her delicate bone structure, vulnerable eyes, and husky voice that always sounds as if it were about to break endow Klara's character with a physical fragility.

Characters in earlier films had their vulnerable moments as well, but in the past Lubitsch allowed such physically direct expression only for sexual longing. For all that *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living* draw on the Depression, these few moments of physical desperation in Sullavan's performance suggest far more of the everyday difficulties facing individuals through the period of crisis. The characters in the earlier films are physically too strong and resourceful not to survive either poverty or their romantic confusions, but when Klara's world in *The Shop Around the Corner* begins to fall apart, she herself collapses.

A job became as much a necessity of characterization for Lubitsch in this period as it was a life's necessity for his characters. He told an interviewer at the time of *Ninotchka* of a change in his approach to character:

> It was a review of this last [*Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*] that prompted the director to change his ideas about picture-making. The critic, although he himself enjoyed the comedy of a handsome philanderer and the wife who finally tamed him, wondered whether, *in these days*, audiences were much interested in people who had no visible means of support.
>
> Mr. Lubitsch had not thought of that before. He was frank about it, saying:
>
> "That's right, you know. We can't make pictures in a vacuum now. We must show people living in the real world.
>
> "No one used to care how characters made their living—if the picture was amusing. Now they do care. They want their stories tied up to life. People nowadays have to make their living."
>
> That makes it all a little harder. Once Mr. Lubitsch was able to present a charming rich young man as hero, and no one would ask questions. No one would wonder how he got to be a rich young man, whether he inherited or stole those riches.
>
> "Now he must have a job," Mr. Lubitsch said, a little regretfully, "or else the fact that he doesn't work becomes the important thing about him." (*New York Sun*, November 7, 1939)

True to his word here, Lubitsch has only two characters in subsequent films—Leon in *Ninotchka* and Henry in *Heaven Can Wait*—

who have neither job nor profession, and they are in part defined by this lack. Lubitsch made these remarks shortly before he began filming *The Shop Around the Corner,* in which all the major characters are not only gainfully employed, but strongly defined by their jobs. For all the sense of a job as a necessity in the later work, this film nonetheless remains unique in Lubitsch's career in its concerns for the average man whose entire life revolves around his job.

At the end of Robert Sherwood's *Idiot's Delight* (1936) the heroine Irene, suddenly faced with the onslaught of a war begun by an unidentified fascist nation, proclaims herself and her sometime lover Harry as representatives of "the little people." As a matter of fact, neither one of them is typical of any class or type, and the original production casting of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, the doyens of high comedy, suggests something more uncommon about them that might even be called aristocratic. But the phrase "the little people" had become such a clichéd signifier of virtue in this period, especially when confronted with the threat of fascism, that it could be applied almost indiscriminately as a defense of the democratic spirit.

In this regard, screwball comedy in its apparent celebration of individual eccentricity against mass conformity might be seen as the democratic answer to fascism. Certainly the films of the period show an increasing concern with the democratic way of life and the structure of society, much as Frank Capra's films were becoming more and more political. The enormous critical and popular success of Capra in this period as well as the success of William Saroyan on the stage with his great celebration of the little people in *The Time of Your Life* (1939) make it seem inevitable in retrospect at least that Lubitsch would have to abandon his upper class milieu to embrace the little people as well. Because the phrase, as Robert Sherwood demonstrated in *Idiot's Delight,* could be used rather freely in the period, I would like to define it more precisely through the films of Frank Capra to show how it might be applied to Lubitsch.

Capra's cinema may best be described as "populist" in its concerns for the little people rather than proletarian: as populism was chiefly a movement of farmers, a small-business ethos pervades Capra's films. For all of Capra's attacks on capitalists in his work of the late thirties, there are never any industrial workers in his films. Rather, the milieu remains solidly middle class, with the middle-class family seen as the key to the stability of a social order that had not appeared particularly stable throughout most of the decade. As Europe drew America into war, the extremely popular Andy Hardy series at M-G-M was given specifically political significance by a special Academy Award presented in 1942 to the entire series, to "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studio, for its achievement in representing the American Way of Life in the production of the Andy Hardy series of films." The American Way of Life in the form of capitalism was never at fault in Capra's films; rather, Big Business in the late thirties had come to occupy the central position in Capra's demonology much as it had in President Roosevelt's. The casting of James Stewart in *The Shop Around the Corner,* fresh from his triumphs in two Capra films, evoked the Capra universe of the average middle-class American. One reviewer at the time could in fact look beyond the film's European setting to see its clear connection to American culture: "The shop is in Budapest. It might just as well be in New York, or Middletown" (*New York Sun,* January 26, 1940). The shop might indeed have been anywhere, but the casting made that anywhere specifically the American small-business world with the defending American of James Stewart at its center.

Aesthetically, one of the most fascinating aspects of Lubitsch's later films is their experimental quality: the odd commingling of genres in *Ninotchka* (romantic comedy and political satire), *To Be Or Not To Be* (romantic comedy, political satire, and spy melodrama), and *Heaven Can Wait* (romantic comedy and family saga) together with their looser, often lopsided narrative structures. By contrast, *The Shop Around the Corner* is one of his most conventional films, both in subject matter and structure, as if the conventionality of approach were itself a reflection of the film's milieu. Having been written immediately following his dismissal from Paramount, it may be partly a response to the problems of a faltering career, an attempt to flow with the strongest current in American screen comedy by moving, indirectly through Europe, into Capra-esque territory. Although it was produced after *Ninotchka,* I would like to consider *The Shop Around* *the Corner* first here because its very conventionality makes it a convenient point of departure for the later films.

However conventional the film might be, publicity at the time treated *The Shop Around the Corner* as a major departure for Lubitsch. Certainly the sense of everyday life and the shop milieu were unlike anything in Lubitsch's previous American films, but the film does nevertheless contain clear echoes of both a professional and personal past, which has made Carringer and Sabbath describe it as "prelapsarian" (p. 28). They intend the adjective chiefly for its autobiographical reference to Lubitsch's youth in his father's clothing shop, but a connection to the past more important for his artistic development may be found in a number of the German silent comedies in which he starred. Most specifically, Lubitsch's aggressive and wily shop lad of the German films finds a close descendant in Pepi in *The Shop Around the Corner,* the errand boy who manages to get promoted to sales clerk by a combination of pure blind luck and determination.

The last German shop films had been made some twenty years before, and Lubitsch's vision had changed markedly since that time. Vulgarity and directness had given way to sophistication and restraint, and although he returned to the milieu of the earlier films he kept to the more elevated and elegant tone of the later works. There are other departures of attitude from the German shop films that are of interest because they show both how much Lubitsch is responding to his period and how much his own vision is changing. In the German comedies the dramatic orientation is very much toward the individual. As a kind of ruthless capitalist fable, *Schuhpalast Pinkus* (1916), for example, presents its shop as a means to an end for a character with fierce libidinal drives who charts his own unstoppable rise to social power.

The world of *The Shop Around the Corner* by contrast is both more orderly and more sedate, and all rises to power must be handled with a sense of propriety that might be worthy of a kingly succession. More important in reflecting its period, the emphasis in the later film shifts from an individual to an awareness of the group. Typical of the photographic style at the turn of the decade, *The Shop Around the Corner* uses soft-focus backgrounds in medium and close shots, yet in a staging procedure that reflects the limited movement toward a deep-focus style at the time, scenes in the shop itself frequently have other activity taking place in the background as two or three characters might be talking in the foreground among themselves. The staging does not so much divide attention in a shot as the deep focus style of Jean Renoir or Orson Welles might do; rather, it unobtrusively makes the viewer aware that there are always other people present in this setting, itself a public arena.

This manner of staging may be linked thematically to the public-private opposition I have discussed in earlier films, but there is also something different in that the public is so often in witness to the private that the meaning of an individual experience can no longer be limited to the individual. Whatever may happen to Kralik in this showroom, for example, in some way happens to all the other people there as well, so that the devastating emotion of Kralik's departure from the shop after he has been fired by Mr. Matuschek is handled not in the strictly personal terms, say, of the execution in *Anna Boleyn,* nor with the public-private opposition at the end of *The Merry Widow* that keeps these spheres of experience discrete. Rather, there is a striking long shot tableau with four coworkers standing stock still, two on either side of the image, all obviously shaken by the experience, as Kralik in the center walks out the door. The simplicity and directness of feeling in the mise-en-scène is made complex as individual experience transforms itself into group emotion. In the integration of the individual and the group, Lubitsch opens up a new stylistic trail toward whole spaces which I will discuss in more detail below.

As much as the visual style gives greater importance to secondary characters, it remains a fairly simple matter to pick out the major characters and determine what the main lines of the narrative are. Still, one of the most compelling aspects of the film's structure is the manner in which the various strands of the narrative move with a causal inevitability toward interlocking climaxes of disillusionment: the firing of Kralik because Mr. Matuschek, having lost faith in his most trusted employee, believes him to be having an affair with Mrs.

Matuschek; which leads a disillusioned Kralik not to reveal himself as planned to his anonymous pen pal; which in turns leads Klara, the pen pal, to doubting her own self-worth. As inevitable ties are drawn between the fates of individual characters, *The Shop Around the Corner* is as much concerned with the fate of society at large as it is with the fate of an individual. Lubitsch can no longer divorce the two as he had done in the earlier historical dramas. The material of the film is not explicitly political, yet in its sharp concerns for the inner workings of a coherent social group—the establishment of hierarchies, individual action played against the ever-present group, a sense of the connectedness all pervasive from individual to individual—the film is more thoroughly political than any of Lubitsch's historical dramas.

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"Never did I make a picture in which the atmosphere and the characters were truer than in this picture" (quoted in Weinberg, p. 267). It may be argued that Lubitsch's films, however stylized, contain their own emotional truths, but "true" as Lubitsch applies it here connotes a naturalism that deals in everyday reality. All art is stylized to the extent that it is art and not life, and it is in the peculiarities of stylization that the author's voice may be most strongly felt. As Lubitsch moved more to the dominant naturalistic style of the period, his voice naturally became quieter, at times for a number of critics of his films, to the point of inaudibility.

In one regard, Lubitsch's style comes full circle in *The Shop Around the Corner*, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it has moved in something of a spiral, ending up at a point similar to where he began and yet different. If the earlier films had no clear voice, it was in part because the author had not yet found his voice. And if the early slapstick comedies contain in their slapstick fashion a kind of realism, it is chiefly an accidental realism, a result of speedy and inexpensive production which had to take advantage of either cheap or available settings. As the comedies became longer, costlier, and more sophisticated in the late teens, the look of the films became increasingly artificial, culminating in *Die Puppe* (1919) with its consistent use of flat cardboard sets even for exteriors. For all their factual falsification in plotting, the historical dramas do have something of a realistic style to the extent that they attempt within limits a faithful recreation of the look of a period. But this physical realism does not in any way signify a naturalism because the shooting style always renders the chief impact of the setting as metaphorical. As Lubitsch moved behind the camera with his feature-length films, as his artistic ambitions increased, the progressively more overt stylization became a means of announcing his own artistic personality in bold fashion.

The Shop Around the Corner carried the naturalistic style that was to dominate the late films to its furthest extreme. Press releases at the time emphasized the meticulous research that went into creating the interior of a Budapest leather goods shop:

> To assure authenticity in the setting, research expert Henry Nordlinger worked for weeks before the film went into production, checking on all items such a store would carry. He obtained an inventory from Budapest as a guide. This disclosed that most of the leather goods sold in Budapest are of American make. Particularly popular are suitcases of tan leather.

Lubitsch here displayed an almost obsessive concern for realistic detail that might rival Erich von Stroheim's. He insisted that real ice be used to produce snow for one brief exterior scene. And when Margaret Sullavan brought him a $1.98 dress she had bought for the part, he said: " 'Too smart for a clerk looking for a job.' He had it altered to be ill fitting and then left out in the sun until it had a faded appearance."* Clothing here might still be seen to have metaphoric value to the extent that it does serve as a vehicle of expression, but the expression is no longer a matter of individual personality so much as economic type. The chief effect of the dress, then, is not so much to tell the viewer what Klara might be feeling as to indicate that this is the best she can afford.

Similarly, there is a weakening of the metaphoric value that goes

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*Both items may be found in the pressbook for *The Shop Around the Corner* on deposit in the collection of the Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, New York.

further than *Angel.* It can be important to the meaning of an action where it takes place: for example, the fact that the final reconciliation between Kralik and Klara is in the public showroom rather than the relatively more private back rooms does have a suggestive force which I will discuss later in this chapter. The important point to note here is that the setting does not so much reflect the meaning of the action as have a direct influence on the action itself. For that reason, there is a greater sense of the independence of setting throughout the later films, a sense that settings have meaning in themselves which may be divorced from the actions of the characters within them. When Gaston in *Trouble in Paradise* initially makes his progressive movements into the private areas of Mariette's house, the metaphoric meaning of the setting is clearly defined by the action in Gaston's growing intimacy with Mariette; the setting has no function apart from his actions. By contrast, the different areas of Mr. Matuschek's shop are a determinant of action: characters enter the backrooms generally because they have specific business there, and once there they may then, given the greater intimacy of the setting, engage in more private conversation.

As *The Shop Around the Corner* insistently places individual experience in the context of a larger society, the new sense of setting repeatedly moves the focus from the individual to something that exists independently of him. As Lubitsch's later films become more firmly rooted in a definite place and time, as his style moves toward accepting the concrete world as an *a priori* reality apart from his characters, his vision approaches a transcendental quality that projects a sense of life extending far beyond the individual.

The change in the *value* of the setting and costume is accompanied by a change in Lubitsch's shooting style that remains consistent throughout the later films. On the surface, Lubitsch's style now looks very much like the dominant style of the period. Careful viewing might mark a film as idiosyncratically Lubitschean, but careful viewing had never been needed to spot the Lubitsch touches in the earlier films. How much his films began to look like other films of the time may be seen from recent critical comment on two of them. Leland Poague in his monograph on Lubitsch writes:

> *The Shop Around the Corner* is an acted film, photographed for the most part in eloquently simple two-shot, which allows Lubitsch to focus on interaction and emotion. (p. 38)

More extreme is Richard J. Annobile's comment in the introduction to his picture-book edition of *Ninotchka:*

> Lubitsch's direction in *Ninotchka* is plain and unobtrusive. He has a sense of scene—and the film is basically a series of prolonged scenes, but one would be hard pressed to consider his style cinematic. Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* could easily have been a stage play. (p. 6)

The critical insensitivity of these comments aside, they do reveal an important element of the later films by their very inability to locate the director's point of view and the resultant feeling that the actors dominate the works. Rather than attempting to create meaning by itself, Lubitsch's camera now seemingly allows itself to be governed by the meaning of the action.

A newspaper article on the production of *The Shop Around the Corner* thought it important to mention that the film was shot in sequence, that is, that all the scenes in the film were shot in the order in which they occur in the narrative (*New York Herald Tribune,* January 21, 1940). This fact is extrinsic to our experience of the film, yet I think it is revealing of the changes in Lubitsch's approach to his material in that it shows him breaking decisively with the fragmented method of his earlier films to embrace a sense of continuity that lends a more seamless appearance to his films, a feeling of a continuous reality that was reflected in the movement toward longer and longer takes in the period.* As Sergei Eisenstein could reasonably defend his extreme fragmentation as a form of realism, neither approach is inherently more realistic, Andre Bazin notwithstanding. But this increasing fluidity of Lubitsch's camera style shows a striving toward *the illusion of a continuous reality* that is the mark of a naturalistic approach. Having said this, however, I would not agree with Poague or Annobile that Lubitsch's camera exists chiefly to display his actors in the best possible manner. To get a more definite sense of Lubitsch's style in this period, I would like to look in some detail at the first two scenes from *The Shop Around the Corner.* As always with Lubitsch, the opening is a structural model of efficient exposition, and yet there is none of the overtly artificial sense of exposition typical of the earlier work.

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* In a study of American films in the thirties, Barry Salt has shown that the average shot in a film had become longer by the end of the decade.

The film proper begins with a long shot of a busy street corner in Budapest. From a stationary position, the camera begins panning right with Pepi (William Tracy), the errand boy, on his delivery bicycle as he comes around the corner on the right, coming to a stop with him in front of the leather goods store, Matuschek and Company, where salesclerk Pirovitch (Felix Bressart) is already standing, waiting for the opening of the store. The scene is initially observed independently of Pepi, so that while the camera orients itself to his motion, it has nonetheless established an independence of view at the beginning of the shot. The simplicity and directness of expression in this opening movement around the corner reinforces the sense of familiarity implied by the language of the introductory title:

> This is the story of Matuschek and Company—of Mr. Matuschek and the people who work for him. It is just around the corner from Andrussy Street—on Balta Street, in Budapest, Hungary.

The camera presents something more than familiarity by the insistence, previously unusual for Lubitsch, of placing the shop within the framework of its neighborhood. We never really know, for example, where Mariette's house is in *Trouble in Paradise,* if there are other houses surrounding it or if it is totally isolated. By the time of *The Shop Around the Corner* context had become an important concern for Lubitsch to the extent that all but one of the later films begins with an introductory title to establish a framework for the narrative.

The opening scene continues with the introduction of new characters, each introduction handled by a cutaway and a camera movement that returns to the front door of the shop: a cut to a three-quarter shot of Flora (Sara Haden), angled to the left to give a clear indication of where she is in relation to the shop, then a pan to the right as she joins the two men; a cut to a full shot of Ilona (Inez Courtney), angled to the right to locate her, then a pan to the left as she joins the other three; a cut to the street to a long shot of Vadas (Joseph Schildkraut), panning right with him as he joins the group; finally, a cut to a cab as Mr. Matuschek gets out in three-quarter shot and walks up to his employees in front of the store. The most striking formal aspect of this sequence is the tight patterning of cutting and movements to create an overpowering fluidity that is diametrically opposed to the earlier Lubitsch fragmentation.

There is one important exception here in the introduction of Kralik: unannounced by any cutaway, he simply walks into a group shot. The very unobtrusiveness of the introduction of Kralik by the unannounced break in pattern is typical of the quieter surprises of the later Lubitsch films, as it is also perversely striking because the casting of Stewart in this part clearly marks Kralik as the lead. But to understand fully this one break in the pattern, it is necessary to look at the transition between this and the subsequent scene.

The next scene presents a conversation between Kralik and Pirovitch in the stockroom. Since Kralik chooses this moment to read Pirovitch the contents of a letter from an anonymous woman he has been corresponding with, it is appropriate that the conversation take place in the relative privacy of the stockroom. Yet, there is no simple opposition here to the public grouping in front of the store because of an intervening shot that serves to connect the two scenes: the final shot of the first dissolves into an extreme long shot of the store interior. At first glance, the shot is too distanced to focus on any particular character so that the store itself appears to be the primary object of interest. Soon enough, Pirovitch, who had been barely noticeable on a small spiral staircase, attracts attention by making the most movement in the shot when he walks, carrying a load of boxes, to the stock room.

This shot serves no narrative function: it gives no important information either about character or developing story. The one thing it does do is establish the interior space of the store almost in its entirety and locate the *exact* position of the stockroom in which the next scene will take place. It is precisely in this kind of waste shot that a director may most clearly reveal himself, for the pressure of the narrative is slackened enough to reveal a meaning apart from the story line. It is fairly easy to imagine the Lubitsch of the earlier films going directly to the stockroom and going there with a fairly close shot at that, so that the entire area of the store and the topographical relationships of the different rooms would only progressively be revealed through the subsequent scenes. Lubitsch who once seemed to avoid master shots at all costs suddenly thinks it necessary to have an establishing shot!

This is a very brief shot, but its presence is registered because it serves as a keystone to cement the first two scenes together. It also serves as a keynote to Lubitsch's later style, for which reason I want to consider its implications further. First of all, the shot most obviously works as an extension of the fluid style of the opening scene, so that once the entire space of the shop has been established, the camera is then free to move about it without losing an exact sense of spatial relationships. The film is full of tracking shots through the entire store, a familiar element in the film's style that define the limits of character movement within this enclosed space. Given this subsequent sense of limitation, the entire space must be established before any action is seen to undercut any possible sense that the individual is determining the movement in the tracking shots. As the long shot shows, this is a restricted world with only so many ways of moving through it, and so must all the characters move through the rest of the film.

Second, the long shot establishes a sense of primacy to the setting: we look at *it* before we take notice of any character, much as we look at the busy Budapest street before we pick up on Pepi's movement. As the focus here has briefly shifted to setting, Lubitsch in his late films will always be concerned with establishing a preexisting context. Finally, as I have noted something of a muted quality in the usual Lubitschean surprises and ironies in *Angel*, I can now locate an important stylistic reason for that muting. Having established the entire playing area at the outset, Lubitsch has effectively cut himself off from the kinds of spatial surprises that are so common in his earlier films.

To return to the opening scene, not only are there fewer surprises, but the sequence works on a pattern of expectation that is a key to

the meaning of the style. That is, every time there is a cutaway, there occurs a simultaneous expectation of movement back to the slowly incrementing group in front of the shop, so that the shop begins to take on something of a magnetlike quality, drawing characters to itself, rather than simply allowing them to approach. In the insistent movement from individual to group, there is a sense on the one hand that individuality precedes group identity, which is the force this figure of style has in *Design for Living*, where it first appeared in Lubitsch's oeuvre. On the other hand, the repeating pattern in *The Shop Around the Corner* suggests something that exists beyond each individual because the patterning establishes the shop as a social microcosm forcibly drawing each individual to it and defining character by position within the social group.

With each introduction a character is neutrally defined until he or she enters the group and begins interacting with other members. Even Vadas, whose flashy clothes, jewelry, and walking stick immediately give away an aspect of his personality, cannot be fully read until the negative reaction of the group is seen, because Ilona, who is also something of a flashy dresser, is more fully accepted by the group. No previous Lubitsch film is so thoroughly interested in the dynamics of a group: where society in the past might have functioned as a restriction on personal desire, this is the first film to posit personality itself as a function of society. By contrast, the characters in the earlier musicals and comedies have opportunities and restrictions defined for them by class, but their romantic longings, the central aspect of personality for Lubitsch in these films, are all their own and transcend class.

The shop is made to function as a social institution which shapes the feelings of its constituents. From *Ninotchka* through *Heaven Can Wait* characters all owe allegiance to a social unit that is in large part a determinant of their personalities: the Communist party and the Soviet Union for Ninotchka, the shop in *The Shop Around the Corner*, the "Teatr Polski" for the actors in *To Be Or Not To Be*, and a family spanning four generations, and by implication stretching infinitely forward and backward, in *Heaven Can Wait*. Only in *Cluny Brown* are the characters denied a sense of belonging, but this denial then becomes a key issue of the film, with the cultural displacement of political emigre Adam Belinski finding a sympathetic echo in the social displacement of low-born Cluny Brown.

The shop is not the only part of these characters' lives; most of them in fact have lives apart from it, and there is a whole host of characters talked about but never seen. Even toward the end of the film when Pepi and Mr. Matuschek stand in front of the shop discussing plans for Christmas Eve and Pepi points to his date waiting for him across the street, Lubitsch keeps the camera trained on the two men, refusing to cut to an insert of the waiting blonde. The point of this restricted vision is that the shop is the only context in which their lives in the film are defined; outside the shop, they are different people as defined by different contexts. Only Kralik, who by his introduction does not seem to exist apart from the group, has no life apart from the shop: his sense of himself is defined entirely by his central position within the group and within the shop. As he is central to the shop, the shop is central to his life.

In the opening scene each character defines him- or herself by position in the shop and interaction with other characters. Through the course of the film we get to know more about some characters, not much more about others, but nothing subsequently disturbs these primary definitions. As there are no surprises of character, the chief interest in the opening where no narrative information is advanced lies in the types themselves and how they play off one another. There is a real delight in the variety of types that gives the film something of a democratic spirit which suggests both Capra and Saroyan. Where the earlier comedies divided all characters into the two opposing categories of sophisticates and fools, *The Shop Around the Corner* presents a wider range of character types to create a more complete sense of an entire society.

As the characters are given such clear and immediate definition, there is a sense of orderliness here that Carringer and Sabbath ascribe to the film's closely following the conventional plot pattern Northrop Frye analyzed in "New Comedy." The Oedpial plot that Frye sees as underlying the plot of all romantic comedy is in fact central here while it remains more on the periphery of other Lubitsch films in

this period. And where both *Ninotchka* and *To Be Or Not To Be* present odd mixtures of comic types that make them difficult to read, here the comic types are presented in an almost archetypically pure form: the old king of Mr. Matuschek who must relinquish control of both his wife and his kingdom, his shop, in the course of the narrative; the young prince of Kralik who is also a plain-dealer and who ascends to power by his plain-dealing; the pretender (*alazon*) of Vadas who must be driven out for the sake of the larger society; and the ironist (*eiron*) of Pirovitch who is both of society and somewhat outside of it, an alternate father figure to Kralik. Linking characters up to familiar types in this manner is not to claim that there is no sense of individuality in this film. Any comparison of secondary characters in *The Shop Around the Corner* with those in the earlier films will give a convincing proof of the more rounded, human dimension to character in this film. But by strongly invoking conventional types, as the film does, personality is established as much as a function of something outside the individual as it is a creation of the individual.

As character is more clearly defined by society here, the opening exchange between Pepi and Pirovitch in front of the store presents a central concern for the rest of the film by setting self-image against social image:

PEPI: Good morning, Mr. Pirovitch.
PIROVITCH: Good morning.
PEPI: Always the first one, ha?
PIROVITCH: It's none of your business . . . And let me tell you, it doesn't hurt to be too early.
PEPI: What for and why? Who sees you? Me! And who sees me? You. What does it get us? Can we give each other a raise? No!

Pepi effectively raises the question of whether Pirovitch gets to work early because of some sense of himself or what he expects others to think of him. This conflict between the way you see yourself and the way other people see you is a central problem for virtually all the characters in the film, a concern that derives in part from the shifting perceptions in *Angel*. As the conflicts between self-image and social-image are dramatized through the successive disillusionments of the various characters, Lubitsch provides an incisive observation on the precariousness of middle-class life: for all the orderliness of life on the surface, there remains an uncertainty about one's position in the social hierarchy as self-image might not conform to actuality. From his own point of view, for example, Vadas is clearly superior to all the others, while the others think the reverse.

Even while operating within this exclusively middle-class milieu, Lubitsch retains a sense of social order that is hierarchical. As the nature of the hierarchy is less well-defined than that of the historical dramas and the Ruritanian musicals, the characters are necessarily less sure of themselves. As a character's sense of self derives in large measure from the way he sees himself in the hierarchy, the uncertain nature of his position, depending on how he chooses to view it, can lead either to self-respect or self-hate because position within the hierarchy indicates both achievement *and* limitation. When Pepi describes himself to Mr. Matuschek's doctor as "a contact man; I keep contact between Matuschek and Company and the customers . . . on a bicycle," the doctor pegs him more accurately and deflatingly, "You mean, an errand boy." Pepi responds with the strong sense of self that will eventually land him his clerk's job: "Doctor, did I call you a pill peddler?"

As low man on the totem pole at Matuschek and Co., Pepi is especially sensitive to titles because it is the title that defines the limitation or the elevation of his position, how it is viewed by the rest of society. While visiting Mr. Matuschek at the hospital, he hints around that he would like to be promoted for having saved Mr. Matuschek's life:

> PEPI: Now, if you want anything else, you know where to reach me—I'm still nothing but an errand boy at Matuschek and Company.
> MR. MATUSCHEK: In other words, you'd like to be a clerk.
> PEPI: I wouldn't put it that brutally.

There is an underlying dark view to the social order that strongly contrasts with the comforting middle-class conformism that dominated popular films of the period like those of the Andy Hardy cycle, for the very orderliness of existence, and of the film itself, that gives the characters such a strong sense of security and confidence also

necessarily makes them uncertain of themselves as it compounds self-respect with self-hate.

These conflicting views of self find their fullest expression in the central plot device of the secret correspondence between Kralik and Klara, because in the abstracted and idealized world of their letters they are able to achieve a meeting of the minds while in the everyday reality of their shop world they become arch enemies. Their conflict in the real world is given something of a political cast in that Klara in her first meeting with Kralik effectively challenges his authority in two interconnected ways: by selling a cigarette box Kralik has already rejected as unfit merchandise for their kind of customer, which in turn enables her to secure a job as a salesgirl after Kralik had already turned her down. To a degree the battle is similar (with the sexes reversed since the world is more conventional) to that of *The Love Parade* where Count Alfred's male pride takes offense at the political power Queen Louise has over him. But in *The Love Parade* the social order in no way undermines Alfred's sense of self, which remains strong enough for him to walk out on the Queen in spite of her power.

In *The Shop Around the Corner* a character's sense of self has become so dependent on the social order that Kralik feels the pride in his abilities as much attacked by Klara's successes as Klara feels her abilities denied by Kralik's power over her. Because self is allied to vectors of power, Klara can protest Kralik's treatment of her in specifically political terms:

> KLARA: No matter what I do, it's wrong. If I wrap a package, that's not the right way. If I make a suggestion—and some of them are very good—you don't even listen. Everything has to be done just exactly your way and even then you don't like it! When I came into this shop I was full of life and enthusiasm and now I'm nothing. You've taken my personality away! You're a dictator, that's what you are!

There is a degree of comedy in the extremity of Klara's response, but it is comedy that does not so much undercut her point as register the full score of her grievance. Self-respect *is* a political matter for these characters because it is for the most part derived from their position in the social order, from the respect other people accord them.

I have suggested in a previous chapter that increasingly in the later films Lubitsch the ironist questioned the value of ironic expression. Irony can be important for some of the characters in the rigidly middle-class milieu of *The Shop Around the Corner* because the divorce between public pronouncement and what the ironic speaker actually thinks can allow for an outward subservience to a social order at the same time that an inward self-respect is maintained. Consider, for example, the manner in which Klara, after months of petty arguing with Kralik, tries to win a favor from him by ironically flattering him and putting herself down at the same time, the two necessarily connected:

KLARA: May I help you, Mr. Kralik?
KRALIK: No, thank you.
KLARA: No trouble at all, I put all the imported bags on the shelf.
KRALIK: Uh-huh.
KLARA: I'm so glad you like it. If there's anything wrong, I'd appreciate if you'd tell me.
KRALIK: Since when are you so interested in my idea of what's wrong?
KLARA: Well, I like to please you, Mr. Kralik. After all, I'm working under you.
KRALIK: You don't have to keep harping on that!
KLARA: I don't mean it that way at all, Mr. Kralik. Regardless of what I think of you personally, I believe that anybody who works with you and doesn't get a great deal out of it is just plain dumb. . . . About that blouse—
KRALIK: Oh, now, I'm sorry. I just *had* to do that.
KLARA: But I want to *thank* you. I'm so glad you did it. You know, in the bottom of my heart, after thinking it over—you're so right. The blouse is really awful.
KRALIK: I wouldn't say awful.
KLARA: Yes, it was. Of course, I didn't admit it at the time, but what woman would? We hate to admit we're wrong—that's why we're so feminine.
KRALIK: Oh, well. You know, this is the first time you've shown a little sense. There's quite a change in you, Miss Novak.
KLARA: I know it.

Klara's ploy works with Kralik initially because she is consciously—and, as her last remark indicates, ironically—placing herself in a position on the hierarchy that conforms, both professionally *and* sexually, to Kralik's expectation of her.

There is a deeper irony at work, however, which envelops Klara's ironies in two ways and affects how we perceive her witty calculation. First of all, Klara is playing up to a man she thinks she hates so that she might leave work early to keep a date with a man she thinks she loves, both of whom, as the audience knows, happen to be the same man. Second, she knows exactly how to play up to Kralik in this manner because she possesses a similar sense of self-respect, just as the high-minded aspirations the two express to each other in their secret correspondence serve as a form of flattery for the receptive reader. As the ironist becomes entrapped within her own ironies, the value of ironic expression must seem increasingly limited.

An ironist *may* have the strongest grip on the reality of his social order because he is the least dependent on it for a sense of self. In advising Kralik not to be upset by Mr. Matuschek's constant complaints, Pirovitch, the film's prime *eiron,* is able to retain a sense of self-respect paradoxically by putting himself down: "He picks on me, too. The other day he called me an idiot. What could I do? So I said, 'Yes, Mr. Matuschek, I'm an idiot'—I'm no fool!"

The limiting factor here is that the ironist might see things clearly, but in holding life at a distance he is as much evading issues as he is confronting them. The repeated shots of Pirovitch retreating as Mr. Matuschek asks for "an opinion, an honest opinion," present both a realistic recognition on Pirovitch's part of the hopelessness of offering Mr. Matuschek *any* opinion, at the same time that they suggest an act of cowardice. Irony, then, is a quiescent mode of expression, an acceptance of a bad situation as inevitable and a concomitant refusal to do anything about it other than to accept that it is bad. Irony is an acknowledgment of powerlessness.

Pirovitch might be something of an alternate and benign father figure to Kralik, but Kralik stands opposed to Pirovitch's irony in that he has managed to rise in the hierarchy on the basis of his plain-dealing. There is an interesting double movement in the film of Pirovitch to plain-dealing and Kralik to irony as each mode acts as a limiting check on the other. It is only at the moment when something he cares about has been endangered that Pirovitch can move to a direct appeal, as he does when Mr. Matuschek has fired Kralik:

PIROVITCH (*desperately*): He is the best man you had, Mr. Matuschek. Why did you let him go?

MR. MATUSCHEK: I warn you, Pirovitch . . .

PIROVITCH: His whole life he lived in this shop. He was almost like a son to you. And you were so proud of him. You invited him to your home again and again . . .

MR. MATUSCHEK: Mr. Pirovitch, you want to keep your job, don't you?

PIROVITCH (*humbly, defeated*): Yes, Mr. Matuschek. I have a family—two children.

MR. MATUSCHEK: In this case, mind your own business and go home.

PIROVITCH: Yes, Mr. Matuschek.

Pirovitch's plainspeaking is no more effective than his irony, yet within the restrictive atmosphere of this world it becomes something of a heroic act. Kralik himself moves toward irony as a way of *not* exercising a power over Klara that he is accidentally granted by his discovery that she is his secret correspondent. His ironic mode allows her to move through her own disillusionment with his support, but on her own and unmanipulated by him.

Given the restrictions of this social order, the fantasy lives of Kralik and Klara embodied in the anonymous letters they send each other operate as a safety valve to ease the tensions between their inner longings for something finer in life and the actual possibilities this life offers them for realization. The point of their not only not recognizing each other in real life but actually being hostile is to show how far their fantasy lives are removed from the reality of their everyday situation. In the context of a fantasy life of unlimited expectation and a real life of monotonous sameness, the secondary plot of the driving out of Vadas reflects the development of the primary plot as a necessary step in the growth of Kralik and Klara because Vadas presents a coarse and cheapened version of their own dreams.

What is wrong with Vadas? He's a flashy dresser and he has high ambitions, but Ilona also dresses beyond her means while Pepi's ambitions are commensurately as grandiose. Nevertheless, Ilona and Pepi are also subject to the checks of other characters in the way they look at themselves, and Pepi when promoted to the ranks of salesclerk may lord it over his new underling Rudy (Charles Smith), but at least he is acting in accordance with the hierarchy by exerting influences only on those below.

Vadas, by contrast, always sees himself as the center of attention, the dominant man in the social order, who may, according to his own lights, operate outside the usual rules of that order. That is, he seeks advancement not by being good at what he does, but by courting the boss's wife. His self-esteem is so inflated that even in the face of reality (in the form of an abrupt dismissal from his job by Kralik), he continues to hold onto his grandiose self-image. Vadas' character, then, projects throughout the film a conflict between self-image and actuality that, for all the hostility of most other characters toward him, peculiarly allies him with all three of the film's leads: Kralik, Klara, and Mr. Matsuchek.

Vadas' chief fault is that he *publicly* displays ambitions that both Kralik and Klara are smart enough to reserve for private expression. Vadas is gross where Kralik and Klara are delicate. The secret ambitions do surface, but only indirectly in the hostility they display to one another: the high-mindedness they can admire in the private fantasy world of the letters is a source of friction in reality. At the end of the film Klara tries to explain to Kralik why, although attracted to him, she nonetheless engaged in constant bickering with him:

KLARA: You see, I was a different girl then. I was really naive. All my knowledge came from books, and at the time I just finished a novel about a glamorous French actress of the Comedie Française. When she wanted to rouse a man's interest, she treated him like a dog.

KRALIK: Yeah, well, you treated me like a dog.

KLARA: Yes, but instead of licking my hand, you barked. You see, my mistake was I didn't realize that the difference between this glamorous lady and me was that she was with the Comedie Française and I was with Matuschek and Company.

Klara must come to this understanding of herself and the restrictions of her life in institutional terms: as it is the institution that determines personality, behavior which might be acceptable within one social order is not in another. The congruence of inner desire and outward behavior that both Kralik and Klara must grow to if they are finally to accept one another makes the driving out of Vadas and his pretenses from the narrow world of their shop analogous to casting off the part of their lives that has kept them apart.

How much the treatment of Vadas here marks a change in Lubitsch's vision may be seen by comparing it to the driving out of the *alazon* characters in the earlier films, those variously played by Charlie Ruggles or Edward Everett Horton, specifically in *Design for Living* and *Trouble in Paradise*. It is easy enough to see these characters as the ancestor of Vadas in *The Shop Around the Corner* in that they all have pretensions to aristocratic or upper class behavior and elegance that the films expressly contradict. As I have discussed in a preceding chapter, the actual aristocrats or wealthy characters of the earlier films are in effect driven out by the more genuinely elegant behavior of the low-born or poorer characters. While the view in the earlier films is thus naturally aristocratic, in *The Shop Around the Corner* the milieu itself so dominates the film that it demands a conformity to an average that Vadas refuses to recognize. Even as Vadas is being treated in a way appropriate to the fools of the earlier works, his refusal to accept the conforming pressures of his world oddly aligns him with the heroes of these films.

Consonant with the conventionality of the rest of the work, the driving out scene is played in an entirely conventional way, allowing for no admixture of feeling that one can see, for example, with Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. As Vadas is ridiculed for his aristocratic pretensions and conquered by average-man Kralik, the milieu of the film exercises an almost oppressive conforming control over its inhabitants. Since this question will come up again with *To Be Or Not To Be*, I would like to note here in passing that there is something of a problem with the form of romantic comedy itself in presenting a democratic vision of society, as this film seems to be trying to do, in that the conventional type of exclusionary plot naturally implies superior creatures set off against the character or characters who are excluded. The form, then, is aristocratic while the mood is democratic, but democratic in the sense finally that all people may be treated alike because their milieu forces them to be alike.

In her study of the rise of an American popular culture, Ann Douglas has claimed that the "exaltation of the average . . . is the trademark of mass culture" (p. 2). But much as the narrative of *The Shop Around the Corner* does present a movement toward conformity to an average, the value implied by this hardly goes unquestioned. There are clearly articulated darker moments in the characters' bifurcated concerns for conforming to and transcending an average. On the whole the more neurotic aspects of James Stewart's screen personality are left unexplored by Lubitsch; they would receive their fullest development only after World War II in a series of Westerns directed by Anthony Mann and suspense films directed by Alfred Hitchcock. There are nonetheless two striking moments when a neurotic intensity suddenly and briefly flares up in Stewart's performance, and both moments deal with Kralik trying to define his life as something average.

The first moment occurs during the second exchange of confidences between Kralik and Pirovitch in which Kralik reveals that although he will be meeting his anonymous correspondent for the first time that night, he is already thinking of marriage. In understanding Kralik's response in this scene, one must keep in mind that he had earlier told Pirovitch, "We've exchanged four letters—and she's no ordinary girl!" From this earlier praise for the girl's exceptional qualities, Kralik, when confronted with the real possibility of marriage, has moved to the attitude expressed in the following exchange:

PIROVITCH: I'm sure she'll be beautiful.
KRALIK: Not too beautiful—what chance has a fellow like me?
PIROVITCH: What do you want, a homely girl?
KRALIK: No, no. You knock on wood for me. Just a lovely, average girl . . .

As Kralik says this, his eyes dart nervously back and forth, expressing both a sense of expectant longing in the character and something close to a fear of actually fulfilling it. As he contradicts himself, Kralik is split in his desires, seeking both the exceptional as a reflection of how he sees himself in his inner life and the average as fitting for his outward possibilities.

The second moment takes place in the cafe when Kralik goes to see his anonymous letter writer, who turns out to be Klara. Because of the double disappointment of losing his job and seeing Klara in place of his dream girl, Kralik does not reveal himself, but does try to engage Klara in conversation to see if he can discover anything of the exceptional woman who wrote the letters in this shopgirl who has done nothing but annoy him. The conversation soon becomes an argument which climaxes in the following fashion:

KRALIK: . . . I'd like to take this opportunity, Miss Novak, to inform you that I don't walk like a duck, and I'm not bowlegged.
KLARA (*provocatively*): Aren't you?
KRALIK (*furious*): No, I'm not!
KLARA (*smugly*): I have information to the contrary. Mr. Vadas assured me that you have your trousers specially made.
KRALIK (*outraged*): Well, that's a lie! Mr. Vadas! . . . So, that's the kind of man you trust, huh? I've never been to a tailor in my life! If you think I'm bowlegged, you come out on the sidewalk with me, and I'll pull up my trousers. How would you like it if I made remarks about your hands being red?
KLARA: That's just exactly what you did.
KRALIK: Yes, but only after you made fun of my legs.
KLARA: And they aren't red at all.
KRALIK: Not any more after I called your attention to them. Now let me tell you something, Miss Novak, you may have beautiful thoughts, but you certainly hide them. As far as your actions are concerned, you're cold and snippy like an old maid—and you'll have a tough time to make any man fall in love with you.
KLARA (*grandly*): I an old maid?! No man will fall in love with me?! Mr. Kralik, you're getting funnier every minute. Why, I could show you letters that would open your eyes—or maybe not. You probably wouldn't understand what's in them. They're written by a type of man so far above you that it is not even funny. Ha! I have to laugh when I think of you calling me an old maid—you, you little, insignificant clerk!

The accusation of tailor-made pants sends Kralik into a rage which causes him to stand up and sit down a number of times as if about to go, but unable to, neurotically drawn in two directions. As the exceptional is naturally connected to the pretensions of Vadas, Kralik by declaring his allegiance to ready-made pants aligns himself to an average which, appropriately to the film's milieu, is expressed in commercial terms. Yet, it is precisely in his hoped-for romance with this woman who is now condemning his mediocrity that Kralik sought to escape this average world of commerce, so that his rage at being made publicly exceptional in the manner of Vadas reflects his own inability to harmonize his values.

Klara is no less torn than Kralik, and there is a bitter irony and sadness to the climax of the argument because, in her ultimate denunciation of Kralik as a "little, insignificant clerk," she might just as well be describing herself. The bitterest aspect of this attack is that even this implied self-hate can never be fully articulated. Rather, it is directed outward, while an active inner fantasy life seeks to deny it by building up self-respect through the creation of a private world. But much as Klara wants something special, she also longs for the safe and the average. At the end of the film when she finally learns that Kralik is "dear friend," her secret correspondent, she asks him to pull up his pants legs before she fully accepts him with a kiss. Klara needs this final confirmation of ordinariness in the straight legs and ready-made pants as her final movement toward acceptance of Kralik, for it is an acceptance of her own ordinariness.

Much as the characters seem to be split in their longings, the film exhibits contrary movements in mood that are most fully realized by an opposition of words and actions in the final scene: as Kralik illuminates Klara on the reality of her longings, he walks around the showroom turning off lights, finally plunging the set into darkness. Similarly, as the film moves through the symbolic deaths of Klara and Mr. Matuschek, both of whom have to take to sick beds when confronted with a reality that does not conform to their expectations or desires, to a new affirmation of life at the end, so the characters also move toward a new existence that is darkly static in its final acceptance of the limitations and restrictions of their lives.

The film ends on Christmas Eve, and if the movement toward Christmas suggests a rebirth motif, there is also a contrary movement in the change of seasons from summer to the heart of winter and falling snow. The lovers might achieve union finally at the end, but this is counterbalanced by a strong sense of isolation as each character leaves individually and the showroom empties itself, with special emotional weight given to Mr. Matuschek's quietly desperate attempts to find someone to spend Christmas Eve with. The sense of death that infiltrates this happy ending recalls the ending of *The Merry Widow*, but where Sonia and Danilo in the earlier film achieve a private reconciliation that sets them apart from their society, the acceptance of their future life for Klara and Kralik is presented in social terms.

By openly confronting their illusions of ambition both Kralik and Klara have finally denied them and accepted their inevitable place in the social order. Positive as this acceptance might be in their working their way through to a romantic understanding, it also signals a clear sense of loss to the extent that they have both accepted a future as little, insignificant clerks. As Kralik was initially presented more directly tied to the shop than any other character, the final scene between Kralik and Klara takes place in the public area of the showroom because their future life is defined by the shop.

The Shop Around the Corner might be the warmest of all Lubitsch films, as a number of critics have noted, but in the sense of loss that accompanies the characters' maturation, a chill invades the comedy. To the extent that it presents a simultaneous distance from and sympathy to the life of its characters which reflects a far more questioning attitude toward middle-class milieu than most Frank Capra films, *The Shop Around the Corner* is clearly the work of the ironist of the earlier films.* But as Lubitsch's attitudes toward ironic expression appear to be undergoing changes within the content of the films, the feelings of the films are changing as well. *Ninotchka*, for example, takes the critical sense of irony here a step further by placing a plainspeaker not unlike Kralik into a world of ironists.

There is a shot early on in *The Shop Around the Corner* that might stand as emblematic for the tone of Lubitsch's later films. As Kralik reads Pirovitch a letter from his secret correspondent, Pirovitch looks on fondly, an indulgent smile playing on his lips that suggests both a distance from the high-flown expression of Kralik and his pen pal as well as a delight in Kralik's foolish emotion. The shot is angled so that Pirovitch is seen full-face, Kralik in profile, and much as Pirovitch's attitude thus dominates this scene, in some ways it dominates the rest of the film and Lubitsch's late work as well.

It's a Wonderful Life (1946), Capra's first film after World War II, is the major exception as it thoroughly probes the negative side of middle-class life.

7

ON THE BRINK

NINOTCHKA

"Comrades! People of the world. The revolution is on the march. I know. Bombs will fall. Civilization will crumble. But not yet, please. Wait, What's the hurry? Give us our moment."

In the late thirties American films were overtaken by an epic impulse. The "A" Western, dormant throughout the first half of the decade, staged a major comeback, first tentatively with Cecil B. DeMille's *The Plainsman* in 1936 and *Wells Fargo* in 1937, then really hit its stride in 1939–40 with DeMille's *Union Pacific* and *Northwest Mounted Police*, John Ford's *Drums Along the Mohawk* and *Stagecoach*, King Vidor's *Northwest Passage*, Michael Curtiz's *Dodge City*, *Virginia City*, and *Santa Fe Trail*, Wesley Ruggles' *Arizona*, Henry King's *Jesse James* and Fritz Lang's *The Return of Frank James*. The expansive approach that these films adopted may seem a natural concomitant of the genre, but it was an expansiveness that found its way into other genres as well. Raoul Walsh's *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), for example, departs sharply from the compact narrative style of the gangster films of the early thirties through a sprawling narrative that ranges from World War I through the Depression and the repeal of Prohibition right up to the date of the film's release. By relating the rise and fall of a gangster to the major historical events of the preceding twenty-four years, *The Roaring Twenties* changed

the focus of the gangster film from individual activity to the historical and political forces behind that activity.

Lubitsch's earlier films might have centered on a conflict between private need and public demand, but to the degree that Lubitsch showed no real concern for the exact nature of public life, the private realm received the primary emphasis. The shift in focus that *The Roaring Twenties* signaled in the gangster film finds a commensurate shift in *Ninotchka* that will hold true, with the one exception of *That Uncertain Feeling*, for the remainder of Lubitsch's films. A context that might have provided background for characters in the past moves with *Ninotchka* into the foreground and will continue to do so in subsequent films: the war in *To Be Or Not To Be*, a small group of people as a social microcosm in both *To Be Or Not To Be* and *The Shop Around the Corner*, history itself in *Heaven Can Wait*, and the English class structure in *Cluny Brown*.

The epic style of the films in the late thirties introduced into Lubitsch's films a clearer sense of history that made the political meanings both more specific and more subject to the changes of historical processes. While there might be something of a historical vision at work in films like *Trouble in Paradise* and *The Merry Widow* to the extent that both films are concerned with temporal change, it is history worked out at the most personal and individual level. Defining character historically became something of a reflex of the period, as may be seen in the screen version of *Idiot's Delight*. When Robert Sherwood in 1939 came to write the screenplay of his 1936 play, he added a fairly long prologue to the original stage action that took his two leading characters through most of the major historical events of their lifetimes in much the same way that *The Roaring Twenties* did. With this addition, the play was no longer simply about two oddball individuals suddenly caught up in a catastrophic event with the onslaught of a fascist war. Rather, as the narrative is presented in historical terms from its very inception, the story takes on an element of allegory in which changes in the characters' lives, now made continuous with history, reflect historical change.

Alongside this movement toward epic and complementing it was the extraordinary politicization of American screen comedy in the thirties through the work of the two most commercially and critically successful comedy directors of the period, Frank Capra and Charles Chaplin. Where a political vision was merely implied in the class conflicts of *It Happened One Night*, the lead characters in both *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and *Meet John Doe* (1941) are directly involved in politics. If Chaplin had shown Lubitsch the way once before with *A Woman of Paris*, then it seems likely that *Modern Times* (1936) and *The Great Dictator* (1940) helped point the way for *Ninotchka* and *To Be Or Not To Be* respectively. The connection between the two anti-Nazi films is particularly strong, not just in subject matter, but in method since both Chaplin and Lubitsch worked in their respective films an unsettling mixture of comedy with melodrama.

Angel had brought Lubitsch the closest ever to a contemporary political reality, but only on the periphery of the drama. Nevertheless, the beginnings of a shift in interest may be seen in *Angel* because it contains, however briefly, some satire of contemporary politics. It is typical of Lubitsch up through this film that politics is presented chiefly as a matter of manners as Sir Frederick's butler and valet discuss the behavior of various delegates at a peace conference:

> GRAHAM: But, on the other hand, the Russians were the surprise of my life. We had two Soviet delegates to dinner and you may not believe it, but I assure you that they were properly dressed—tail coat and white tie!
> WALTON: Well, well, well . . . Maybe the Russians are going places.
> GRAHAM: I wouldn't come to hasty conclusions. They still dunk.

The satire here cuts two ways, making fun both of the extreme snobbishness of the English servants and of Russian diplomatic behavior. In Lubitsch's more overtly political films, the manners of the political characters count as much as their convictions, but the convictions are then fully explored and related to the manners.

Capra's films became explicitly ideological in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *Meet John Doe* as the homespun values of political tyros James Stewart and Gary Cooper were pitted against the totalitarian aspirations of Edward Arnold's businessman. As in Capra, in both *Ninotchka* and *To Be Or Not To Be* character is in part defined by ideology. Up until this point in Lubitsch's career a coherent society provided an order within which (the musicals) or against which (the anarchic comedies) the characters might react. In *Ninotchka* and *To Be Or Not To Be* the conflicts, however personalized, are between social systems themselves so that, as in Sherwood's screenplay for *Idiot's Delight*, something of a historical allegory underlies each film's drama.

Inasmuch as three of the Ruritanian musicals (*The Love Parade*, *Monte Carlo*, and *The Smiling Lieutenant*) center on a class opposition, the dramatic conflict is implicitly ideological, but any attempt to draw a coherent social view from the Lubitsch films of this period would reveal a seemingly schizoid political mentality because the conservative acquiescence in the dominant social order of the musicals collides head-on with the anarchic rejection of society in the straight comedies. The one point of connection between these two opposing views is the need for a private and personal resolution even in the face of public conflicts. The lead characters of the straight comedies reject the dominant societies, but those societies are left dominant nonetheless at the ends of the films. Underlying all these films, then, is a conservative sensibility that believes in an inevitable and immutable social order much as it believes in immutable human behavior.

By the late thirties the developments in Europe and changes wrought in American society by the Depression and the New Deal had to make it clear even to the most politically naive that there were not eternal qualities underlying all social structures, that society itself might be on the brink of collapse. By the time of *Ninotchka*, Lubitsch, in a near complete reversal of the attitudes underlying the historical dramas, began to adopt more of a relativistic view of the changeability of human nature under differing social and political systems. As even the most intimate aspects of the characters' lives in *The Shop Around the Corner* were determined by the shop itself, personality in the overtly political films is in large part determined by the social system to which the character pledges allegiance. As Lubitsch's films entered a world of contemporary political conflicts, ideologies necessarily entered the films themselves.

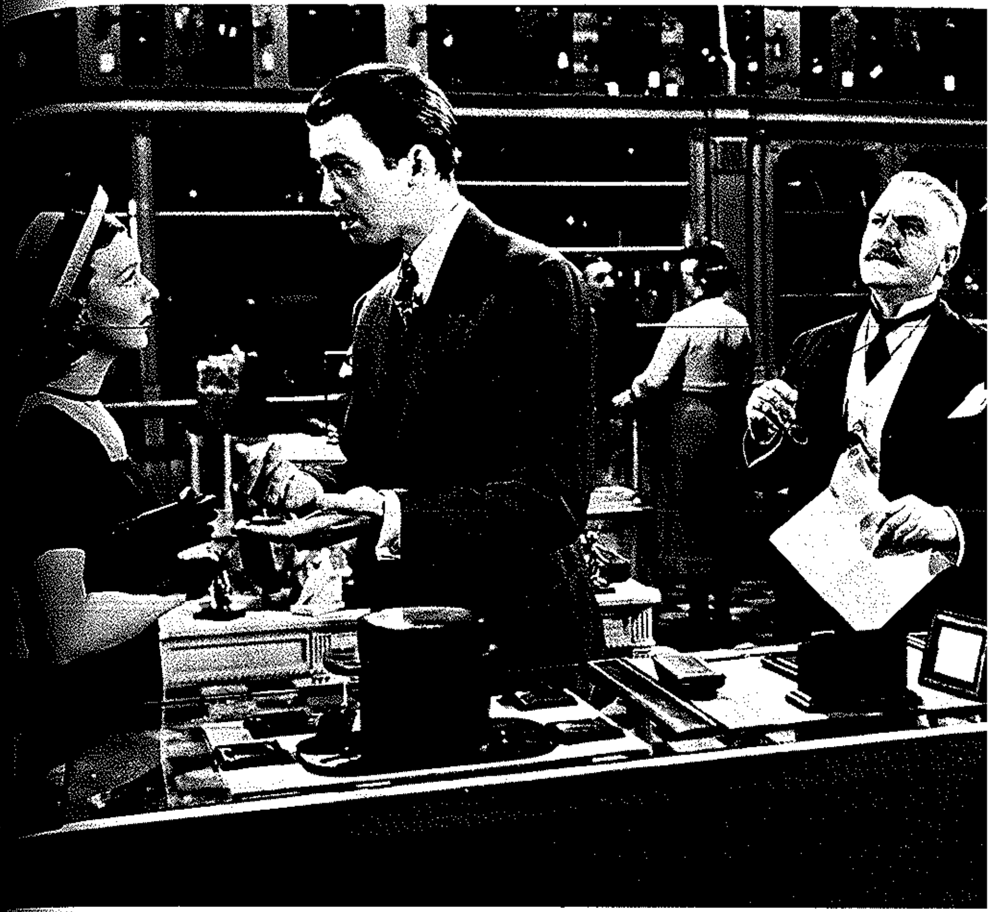
◆

Ninotchka is certainly the most timely of Lubitsch films, so much so that it was already partly out of date when it first appeared. Set in prewar Paris, it had been filmed only a few months before the war broke out, from May 31 to July 27 in 1939. On September 1, about a month before *Ninotchka*'s premiere, Germany invaded Poland, prompting a declaration of war from England and France on September 3. There is one joke of mistaken identity which, after the film's completion, was given a particularly bitter shading by subsequent turn of events. The three members of the Russian Board of Trade, derelict in their duty, have gone to the train station in Paris to meet the "envoy extraordinary" from Moscow, who is to whip them into shape. They spot a man in a distinctly non-Parisian style of dress, become convinced he's the envoy and chase after him. Just as they are about to overtake him, he is greeted by a woman who exchanges a Nazi salute and a "Heil Hitler!" with him. The three Russians are left dumbfounded, Iranoff's "No, that's not him," met with finality by Buljanoff's "Positively not!" The intended meaning of mistaking an enemy for a comrade was given a perverse twist in which the erstwhile enemy did in fact become a comrade because in August, after the film's completion but before its release, the Soviet Union and Germany had signed a nonaggression pact which, in effect, brought an end to the Popular Front.

By the time *Ninotchka* premiered on October 6 a title had to be put on at the beginning to clarify its time setting. In the process, it endowed a contemporary political comedy with an instant pastness, placing current events in the framework of history:

> This picture takes place in Paris in those wonderful days when a siren was a brunette and not an alarm . . . and if a Frenchman turned out the light it was not on account of an air raid!

History necessitated the introductory title, which is a fine turn of events for a film concerned with characters caught up in the inevitable flow of history, but the title itself contradicts some of the most important aspects of the film. By plunging Europe into war, history



Kralik (James Stewart) tells Klara (Margaret Sullavan) that he cannot help her with a job as Mr. Matuschek (Frank Morgan) looks on, afraid that Kralik might be sending away a customer. In the background Pirovitch (Felix Bressart) waits on a customer. Although the background, typical of the photographic style of the period, is in soft focus and the action is clearly of secondary importance, this is nonetheless the first film in which Lubitsch shows concern for background as an independent reality and not primarily a metaphoric extension of the characters' emotions. *The Shop Around the Corner.*

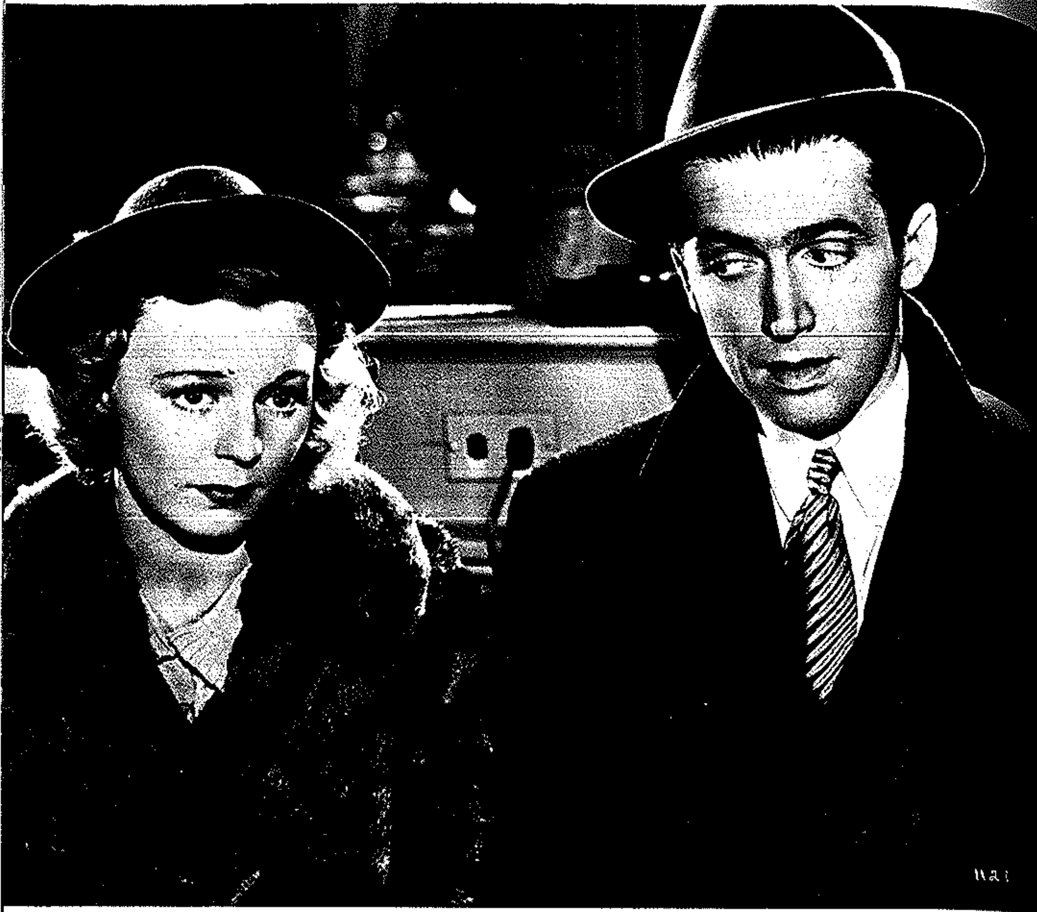
PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

As they put away goods, Klara ingratiatingly tries to cajole Kralik into giving her the night off. This intimate conversation takes place in the more private area of the stockroom. *The Shop Around the Corner.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

A conventional "driving out" scene. As Kralik and Flora (Sara Haden) look on with satisfaction, Pepi (William Tracy) offers the just-fired Vadas (Joseph Schildkraut) his hat, coat, and gloves, only, in a final humiliating gesture, to let them drop to the floor before Vadas can grab hold of them. *The Shop Around the Corner.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

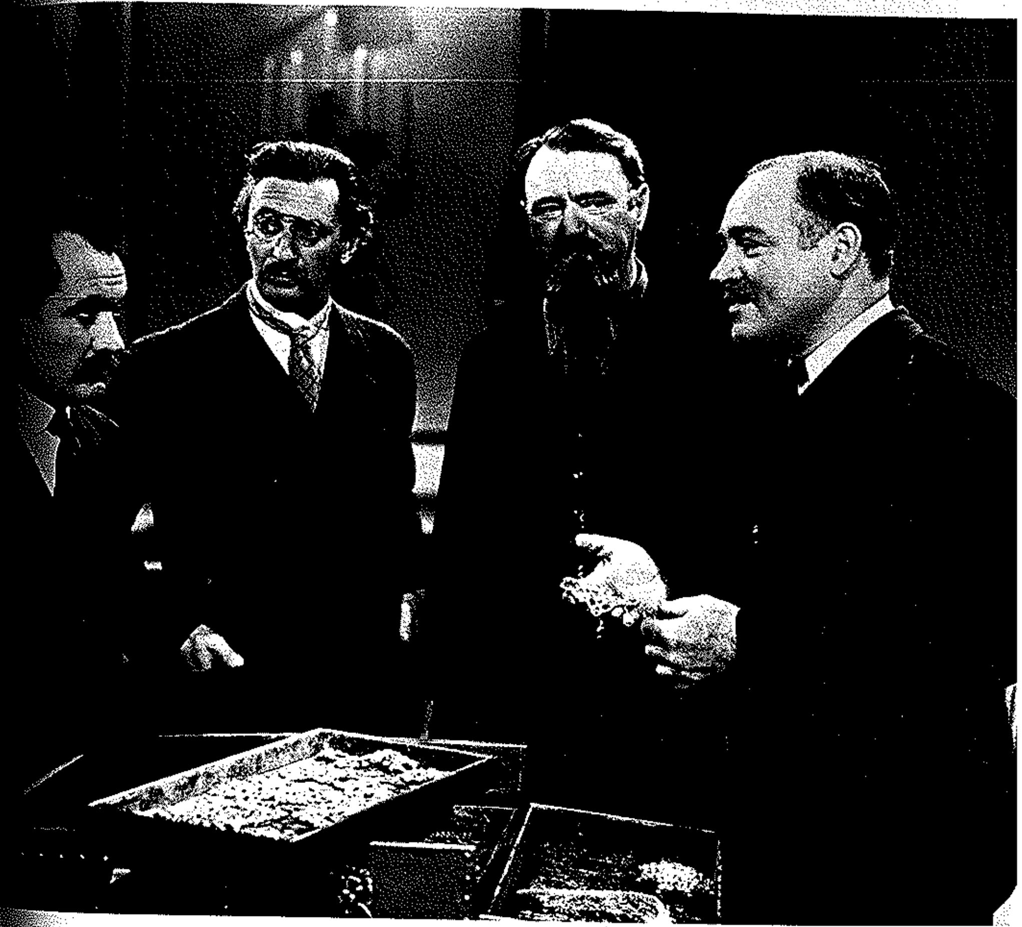


Illumination in a darkened room. Kralik dispels Klara's romantic illusions by describing her imagined lover as fat, balding, and out of work. *The Shop Around the Corner.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

Confronting capitalistic methods. The three comrades Kopalski (Alexander Granach), Buljanoff (Felix Bressart), and Iranoff (Sig Ruman) try to out-bargain the shrewd French jeweler Mercier (Edwin Maxwell). *Ninotchka.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER



Ninotchka (Greta Garbo) and Leon (Melvyn Douglas) laugh over the fact that Ninotchka has finally laughed. *Ninotchka.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

Ninotchka comes to Leon's apartment with her recently acquired silly hat.

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

Ninothcka is lost in a crowd of marchers at a May Day parade in Moscow. The actual shot from the film is further back, making it more difficult to identify Ninotchka. Compare this with the still from *If I Had a Million* on p. 63. *Ninotchka.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

Contest of the egotists. As astounded theater director Dobosh (Charles Halton) and bemused star Joseph Tura (Jack Benny) look on, scene-stealing Maria Tura (Carole Lombard) defends her gown as the appropriate costume for a concentration camp inmate. *To Be Or Not To Be.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF UNITED ARTISTS

The real world enters the comic universe. Supernumeraries Bronski (Tom Dugan) and Greenberg (Felix Bressart) survey the destruction wrought by the Nazis in their invasion of Warsaw. *To Be Or Not To Be.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF UNITED ARTISTS

Acting for real. During a brief intermission in the scene he is playing with Professor Siletsky, Joseph Tura, impersonating Colonel Ehrhardt, receives instructions from Dobosh to bring the scene to a close by killing Siletsky. Because Tura considers this conclusion too realistic, Lieutenant Stanislav Sobinski (Robert Stack), the only character here, other than Dobosh, not in theatrical costume, will fulfill his real-life role of soldier by committing the execution. *To Be Or Not To Be.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF UNITED ARTISTS itself had already undercut the notion of being on the brink of disaster that is so important for the film's mood. But what is particularly misleading about this title is that it suggests a more perfect past, a past free from all tensions and single-mindedly devoted to the clichéd French pursuit of love. The near paradise the title portrays is especially out of keeping with the drama's whole host of oppositions that promise no easy resolution: capitalist-communist, selfish-selfless, aristocrat-peasant, idler-worker, romance-biology, irony-directness, private-public, frivolous-serious, fun-work.

One of the most striking aspects of this film as a product of popular American culture is how many positive attributes in this dialectical list gravitate to the communist pole, while the capitalist side has more than its fair share of negative qualities. The final script of *Angel* contains one overtly political joke I would like to quote here both because it looks forward to the satirical direction Lubitsch would take subsequently, but also because the thrust of its satirical barb is quite different from what occurs in *Ninotchka* and, in differing ways, in *To Be Or Not To Be* as well. This short scene was intended to fit into the montage sequence that shows Sir Frederick arriving back in London from the Peace Conference in Geneva. In the final film this is handled with one newspaper placard announcing his return; in the script, there are a number of placards which introduce the following brief scene:

> A newsboy with a placard which reads: *BULLETIN* (name of paper) FOREIGN SECRETARY PRAISES SIR FREDERICK BARKER
>
> The camera pans a few feet from the *Bulletin* newsboy and discloses another newsboy whose paper reads:
> *THE RED FRONT* (name of paper) EXPENSIVE FAREWELL DINNER ONLY HIGHLIGHT AT GENEVA FULL MENU ON PAGE 3.
>
> *The Red Front* newsboy's papers are not selling. He looks over and sees:
>
> *Bulletin* newsboy
> He is doing terrific business.
>
> *Red Front* Newsboy
> Realizing his anti-capitalistic propaganda is not popular with the London people, and *being a good businessman himself* he turns the placard around. It now reads:
>
> ENGLAND BEATS HUNGARY AT SOCCER 3-1
>
> (alternate insert:) INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL ENGLAND BEATS HUNGARY
>
> His calculation was right. He now sells newspaper after newspaper.*

Lubitsch might have cut this brief scene because its concerns were extraneous to the drama of the film or he might have finally not been satisfied with the quality of its humor. It is a cheap gag, smugly assuming for no good reason that any Communist would like to be a good businessman. The simple and biased cynicism of the satire is out of keeping with the tone of *Angel* in part because the film is neither very political nor satirical.

Ninotchka, however, is both political and satirical, and yet the tone of this joke would be out of keeping with the later film as well because it deals with the kind of simple reversal that is typical of the earlier Lubitsch films but incongruent with the more delicate tone of the later works. Not that the Communists aren't subject to satiric barbs: the mass trials, the lack of privacy, and the oppressiveness of the Stalin regime are dealt with succinctly and sharply. *Ninotchka* does nonetheless set itself somewhat outside the mainstream of American cinema by not asking its audience to take sides, or even more, not allowing them to take sides. Otis Ferguson recognized this difference in his review at the time when he noted, "It is the first movie with any airiness at all to discover that Communists are people and may be treated as such in a story" (pp. 274–75). To the extent that the film treats the Communists with any positive feeling, it is one of the rare American films of the period to project something of the Popular Front spirit, although, by an irony of history, the Popular Front had already passed out of existence by the time of the film's release.

That *Ninotchka* has been critically the most successful of Lubitsch's later films has, I suspect, something to do with the fact that it partly recalls directorial strategies from earlier films. The "Lubitsch touch" type of critic who likes to write about the "ooh-la-la" effect of looking at the outside of a closed door while all the action takes place inside was given a few doors to look at in *Ninotchka*. But while the film does borrow some of the distancing effects from the earlier films, it also shares a stylistic concern for whole spaces and integrating camera movement with *The Shop Around the Corner* of the following year. More overt political content did not bring about a concomitant change in style, but the different style did necessarily spell a differing attitude in these films. For all the ironic distance of the earlier films that may be felt at specific moments in *Ninotchka*, there is a new and growing sense of commitment to ideas.

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* From a copy of the final draft of the screenplay in the personal collection of Samson Raphaelson (emphasis added).

While Lubitsch's late style is generally far less metaphorical, *Ninotchka* is the last film to contain one of the great extended visual metaphors that are so much more common in the earlier films. A fashionable Parisian hat that initially repels then attracts Ninotchka is used to signal her progressive transformation. As such, it provides a good introduction to the film's rich ideological scheme. It is Ninotchka herself who establishes an ideological meaning for the hat when she remarks on first seeing it, "How can such a civilization survive which permits their women to put things like that on their head?" As an afterthought she adds, with great certainty, "It won't be long now, comrades," as if the hat were a key item in the battle between capitalism and communism.

As in *Angel* the object takes on a meaning beyond itself because a character within the film invests it with that additional meaning, an approach that is consonant with the increasingly naturalistic style of these films. Yet, the film had earlier established a metaphorical context for the hat solely by the author's hand in a way that is closer to the style of the earlier films. In fact, it effectively recalls Sonia's transformation from mourning widow to merry through a series of dissolves that change her clothes from black to white. In *Ninotchka*, the transformation of the three Russian emissaries after their first meeting with the French Count Leon D'Algout (Melvyn Douglas) is shown through an insert shot of a hat rack with three hats on it, two Russian fur hats and a kind of touring cap made of a heavy, coarse material. Through a dissolve the three hats transform themselves into two bowlers and a top hat.

The differing manner of investing meaning in these hats as opposed to Ninotchka's hat is important because it establishes a key difference in attitude toward the characters. The indirect presentation of the three envoys' transformation effectively impersonalizes the process, putting an ironic distance between the character and the viewer. Any possibility that the transformation represents a major change of character is immediately undercut by the way it is shown: the Russians are simply doing what they wanted to all along, and are not different people for doing it. At times the film seems to be similarly ironic about Ninotchka's extreme somberness, but it also treats her emotions with a gravity it accords no other character. As the envoys' transformation happens in the twinkling of a dissolve, Ninotchka's is a more deliberate affair to define a gradual growth.

The woman's hat that is Ninotchka's introduction to capitalist culture arrests her in a way that suggests both attraction as well as an openly professed revulsion. As she walks past a store to her hotel suite, the three Russians following behind her purposeful stride, she is stopped dead in her tracks by this sole hat placed in an empty space on a hat stand and occupying one entire show window by itself. *Silk Stockings* (1957), the cold war musical remake of *Ninotchka*, replaced the hat as a symbol of change with the eponymous stockings and, in the process, made a revealing change in meaning. In the later film the objection to the stockings is purely an economic matter since they provide the same function as stockings made from cheaper material but turned into a luxury item solely by the rarity of the fabric. Ninotchka's objection to the hat might ultimately be Marxist, but it has little to do with economics. At first she is not able to recognize the hat as a hat because its form does not suggest a hat's function of protecting the head. In fact, this hat almost seems designed for the opposite purpose: shaped like an upside-down funnel, it exposes the head in an almost inviting way. Inverting a familiar Communist slogan of the thirties, the hat represents a kind of production for uselessness.

The comedy in Ninotchka's first sighting of the hat derives from two sources, both from the hat itself and from Ninotchka's reaction to it. Even in an age with a taste for silly hats, this hat is ridiculous, as was duly noted at the time. The reviewer for *Time* magazine (November 6, 1939), who otherwise considered the satire of the film directed solely against the Communists, thought the hat "looks like a horse's nosebag inverted." In light of a scheme that the film begins setting up here, I think it more accurate to say that the hat looks like a fool's cap with the top cut off, as Ninotchka *will* look somewhat foolish when she finally dons the thing. Furthermore, the manner of presentation—an isolating insert shot approximately from Ninotchka's point of view with the hat on a stand rather than on a mannequin's head—serves to justify Ninotchka's response of not knowing what this object could be by making us see it as she does. Yet, for all this, the very foolishness of the hat makes the seriousness of Ninotchka's response itself seem a little foolish: is this little piece of cloth really sufficient evidence for a judgment about an entire civilization?

Ninotchka's judgment is both comic and serious. The comedy grows out of the very gravity of her response, and the resulting paradox is central to the film's attitudes. So long as we ourselves laugh at the hat, as the shooting style encourages us to do, we sense something of the value of Ninotchka's response. But so long as we laugh at her response, as her extreme gravity encourages us to do, we sense something of the value of the hat. The very shape of the hat which makes it so silly also endows it with its most positive value: the upward swirling sweep that divorces form from function expresses an exuberance that seems an end in itself. Not without a degree of foolishness, to be sure, but it is in foolishness that the vitality is seen to reside. Ninotchka's transformation in accepting the hat is not so much an acceptance of capitalist ways—she never loses her political convictions as the Ninotchka of *Silk Stockings* does—but rather the acceptance of her own foolishness.

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"Garbo laughs!" the ads for *Ninotchka* proclaimed, giving as much weight to this development in her career as earlier ads for *Anna Christie* (1930) had to the fact that "Garbo talks!" Critics since then have not tired of pointing out that Garbo had laughed in films before, but the slogan does offer a sharp insight into the way Garbo's

screen persona was perceived at the time. Garbo might have laughed in the past, but the ability to laugh was hardly made a key element of character as it is in *Ninotchka*. The familiar parody of Garbo as the solitary Swede who wants to be alone, however inaccurate, suggests what is antithetical in Garbo's nature toward laughter because laughter, as Henri Bergson has pointed out, is itself a social activity, "always imply[ing] a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary." However much a story might involve her with other people, she is constantly isolating herself by the very force of her emotions, projecting a kind of somberness and directness of expression that by its very seriousness elevates her above the rest of the cast.

The late thirties was the period in which Garbo, Dietrich, and Katharine Hepburn were all tagged "box office poison" by a nationwide poll of theater owners. As *Desire* had been intended to make Dietrich appear more human, *Ninotchka* was similarly intended for Garbo. "Garbo laughs" was not just a way of indicating that Garbo had become more accessible, but actually taking her down a peg from her aristocratic perch of high seriousness much as Hepburn and Dietrich had to be taken down for their careers to survive. Dietrich and Hepburn went even further than Garbo by moving into slapstick: Dietrich by engaging in a wildly comic saloon brawl with Una Merkel in *Destry Rides Again*, Hepburn by marking her return to the screen after a two-year absence with a slug in the face from Cary Grant at the opening of *The Philadelphia Story*.* Garbo could not go as far down as Dietrich because her personality could not allow the kind of abrupt reversal that Dietrich was able to engineer. If critics in the late thirties generally favored Garbo over Dietrich, it was because she was more clearly engaged in the most apparent function of an actress, namely expression of emotion. Dietrich, by contrast, had progressively stripped her performances of behavioral detail until her sculptured face began to take on a masklike inscrutability. Where

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*James Robert Parish quotes a typical response of the period from an anonymous reviewer who felt *Destry Rides Again* took Dietrich "off her high horse and placed her in horse opera." The implication of this is that the less classy genre was enough to make her more human. Parish, p. 198.

Dietrich's performing style was ironic to the extent that she continually conceals more than she reveals and was therefore suited to the ambiguous realities of *Angel*, Garbo always revealed all.

A 1926 Garbo film, *The Temptress*, points to the clearest difference between the two because its first sequence follows a plot line remarkably similar to *Angel:* a woman meets and has an affair with a man at a party, but never tells him her name. The next day, the man, who had been away from home for some time, calls on an old friend who turns out to be the rather fatuous husband of the mysterious, unnamed woman. As in *Angel* the two men have a scene together before they are joined by the wife. The key difference between the two films is not just a matter of Garbo unmistakably reacting when she sees the lover while Dietrich remains unflappable, admirably bringing off her part as the gracious hostess. Rather, it is the fact that Dietrich continues to play her part even after the husband has left the room, while Garbo in a similar situation instantly bares all: she is in effect always unmasked. The emotional directness of Garbo's Ninotchka represents something new in the Lubitsch universe, the greatest challenge to the various ironists within the film and to the ironic tone of the film itself.

Garbo can be ironic, even playful, as she is for example in George Cukor's *Camille* (1936), but it is a heavy kind of playfulness to the extent that the motivation is always apparent. She does have one line in *Ninotchka* that could be regarded as ironic when she tells the three Russians whose call for cigarettes has brought *three* cigarette girls to their room, "Comrades, you must have been smoking a lot." Garbo's reading of the line, however, has a threatening dourness to it that plays against the surface irony by making the implicit meaning of a stern chastisement explicit. There is nothing playful in her figurative language; rather, it is simply a condemnation of the envoys' irresponsible behavior in their own terms. By contrast, Lubitsch's characters in the past generally found motivation for play in play itself. If Dietrich's Maria in *Angel* does have an ulterior motive for maintaining her mask before Tony when they meet at her husband's home, she is nonetheless able to do this because the affair had begun with a playful confusion of identities and traded ironies.

For Lubitsch, man, or at any rate man at his most civilized, is the animal who plays. The characters who do not play, those who are least ironic and most often played by Edward Everett Horton and Charlie Ruggles, are commensurately the biggest fools. In a universe of playful characters, Ninotchka must appear a fool, but the world itself has changed in this film: poised on the brink of chaos, it seems to certify her seriousness. For all that Ninotchka moves toward a sense of play in the course of the film, her emotional gravity can no more be undermined than her political idealism abandoned. Even through her transformation, she, unlike her three comrades, retains her political convictions.

While the film has occasionally been used as a sounding board for the political persuasions of individual reviewers, most writers on *Ninotchka* have noted that the political satire of the film is directed as much against capitalism as communism. This is nonetheless not a facile and cynical neutrality because the film's treatment of Ninotchka presents her political convictions as one of her most attractive qualities. When Ninotchka chastises the three envoys for their less-than responsible behavior in trying to sell the jewels, she in effect puts the three envoys *and* the audience on the defensive with an intensity of expression achieved through the restrained passion of Garbo's performance and the unusually close placement of Lubitsch's camera:

> "You were entrusted with more than a mere sale of jewelry. Why are we peddling our precious possessions to the world at this time? Our next year's crop is in danger, and you know it! Unless we can get foreign currency to buy tractors, there'll not be enough bread for our people."

From a head-on, full-face close-up of Ninotchka as she says this, a placement granted no other character in the film, Lubitsch cuts to a medium shot of the three Russians seen on an oblique angle, averting their eyes from her gaze in a manner that suggests chastised children. The difference in angle and closeness allows Ninotchka's emotions to dominate the scene, giving a sense of integrity to her feeling that will hover over all the ironies directed toward her through the rest of the film and create a pull in the opposite direction.

The critic for *The Nation* noted in a review at the time (November 25, 1939) that most of the comedy in *Ninotchka* took place around Garbo, who herself, he felt, had little comic talent. At times Garbo does in fact seem like a dramatic actress lost in a comic universe. Virtually all the other characters in the film are ironists of varying degrees, and much of the time the dramatic as well as comic center of a scene lies in a lively battle between Ninotchka's straightforwardness and another character's irony. In traditional comic form the *eiron* is always the triumphant character, yet Ninotchka frequently defeats her ironist-opponents. If *Ninotchka* seems to cut two ways in its comic approach, it does so not for lack of ideological commitment, but because it is a comedy of manners of a rare sort, somewhat like Molière's *The Misanthrope.* Both works are centrally concerned with the workings of society inasmuch as the manners of the leading character go against the ruling social norms and, in this opposition, call them into question. Much as we laugh at Alceste and Ninotchka, we also laugh, albeit with some qualification, at the norms they repudiate. If the film offered no support to Ninotchka's attitudes, there would be little dramatic tension as the character would then be an utter fool and easily dismissed, a situation that is in fact attained in the cold war *Silk Stockings.**

While *The Nation* critic was wrong to dismiss Garbo's talents as a comedienne, his comment does point to the fact that the audience never feels Ninotchka as a comic character. From a traditional comic structure we might expect the ironist (*eiron*) to do battle with a pretender (*alazon*), but there is nothing of the pretender in Ninotchka's character. On the contrary, the reason the ironies of all the film's *eirons* are so ineffective in dealing with her is because she has such a modest opinion of herself. As she tells Leon, without a trace of irony of course, she is merely "a tiny cog in the great wheel of evolution." It is important that Ninotchka never lose her political convictions

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* In light of the support the film gives Ninotchka's political integrity, I find very strange Robin Wood's preference for *Silk Stockings* over *Ninotchka* on the grounds that the later film articulates its ideological concerns more cogently. Wood seriously misinterprets *Ninotchka* when he writes that it "opposes to its simplistically debunked Communism only the materialistic trivia of Capitalism and the dubious charms of Melvyn Douglas." *Film Comment,* May–June 1975, p. 31.

because to do so would establish her in retrospect as something of a pretender. Even after the transformation brought on by her love for Leon, when she and the three envoys have returned to Moscow, Ninotchka continues to counter their ironies with her faith. When she asks them to forget about the royal suite and Paris and simply accept the fact that they are in Moscow, Kopalski replies ruefully, "Yes, there's no doubt about that. Just look out the window, and there it is." Ninotchka will not accept even this minor slight: "And it's great! Think what it was a few years ago, and what it is now. It's a tremendous achievement. You must be reasonable, comrades." Because Ninotchka is no pretender, because her feelings are so direct and integral, she will always remain impervious to the ironies of others.

◆

The opposition between the directness of Ninotchka and the obliqueness of the other characters is central to the film's ideological oppositions. Ninotchka's directness allows for no distinction between public and private behavior that all earlier Lubitsch films see as the *sine qua non* for public figures. She is always precisely what she appears to be. In a deft inversion of conventional values, Ninotchka's concern for truth and plainspeaking cause Leon at their first meeting to call her "barbaric," suggesting that dissembling and deception are true marks of civilization. Extended to a political sphere, the implications of Ninotchka's directness for the ways societies are organized are made clear in the Moscow sequence where no character is in effect allowed a private life, where individual desire is in such opposition to the state that its very existence must be denied. Not just individual desire, but individuality itself since the Moscow sequence begins with a May Day Parade in which Ninotchka is lost amidst a crowd of women all wearing identical costumes.

The film works an intriguing paradox on this point since the close-ups of Ninotchka which grant an *emotional* validity to her argument through the intensity of her individual expression inevitably lead to the impersonal long shots of her in a crowd which denies that individuality. While the long shot suggests there is something wrong with a state that can deny the singularity of Ninotchka's character, at the same time her intense selflessness is what makes her singular and justifies the ideas on which this state is founded. In an action that serves as the culmination of the hat metaphor, a very drunk Leon puts a diamond tiara, one of Swana's confiscated jewels, on an equally drunk but still somewhat resistant Ninotchka and dubs her, "Ninotchka the Great, Duchess of the People, Grand Duchess of the People." As Ninotchka had earlier in the scene referred to the jewels as "the tears of old Russia," the tiara stands for the oppressiveness of any regime that arbitrarily places one person above the other, and yet at the same time Ninotchka by the very intensity of her concern for other people is worthy of this distinction, is in effect above the people she dedicates her life to. That the film finally sides with no ideology is not so much a mark of cynicism as a clear-sighted understanding of the paradoxical nature of all beliefs.

Ninotchka's refusal to accept the split between public and private norms that most Lubitsch characters in the past advocated suggests something of a puritanism opposed to the libertinism of Leon much as communism is opposed to capitalism, East to West, reason to emotion and, what at first blush seems an odd ally to puritanism, sex to romance. Ninotchka makes her puritan conscience explicit when she is unable to accept the happiness of her love for Leon as a value in itself: "I am so happy! No one can be so happy without being punished. I will be punished and I should be punished." The materialist who can regard everything solely for its utilitarian value must be suspicious of anything directed entirely toward one's own gratification. The paradoxical side of this attitude emerges in its fullest flowering when Ninotchka insists she would be "much happier" if she were shot, self-destruction in this case being the only possible means of self-fulfillment. Internal needs having been made to conform to the external demands of society, Lenin emerges as a strict father-figure to whom the Russians all appeal to justify their behavior. The three envoys argue, however ironically, that Lenin would want them to stay in a first-class hotel. And Ninotchka, after her drunken evening with Leon, appeals to a forbidding photograph of Lenin, "Smile, Little Father, smile!" the force of which fantastically makes the stern face of this frozen image melt into a smile.

In this battle between puritanism and hedonism, the real opponents to the Communists are not specifically capitalists so much as the decadent, pleasure-seeking, self-indulgent royalty of past ages. The only actual representative of contemporary capitalism in the film is M. Mercier, the jeweler who is trying to purchase the Grand Duchess' jewels from the three envoys, and he is dealt with briefly and satirically when two of the envoys comment on the jeweler's claim that he expects to take a loss on his purchase of the jewels:

IRANOFF: Capitalistic methods.
BULJANOFF: Hmmmm. They accumulate millions by taking loss after loss.

The two representatives of the aristocracy, the Grand Duchess Swana (Ina Claire) and Count Leon D'Algout, are initially at least not capitalists very simply because they have no capital, and Swana is not at all interested in capitalistic methods for getting it. Leon is somewhat more enterprising, as he has made arrangements to sell Swana's memoirs to a newspaper or, put in his own insensitive terms, "We won't have to worry about our future if you're willing to raffle off your past."

If Swana is not a capitalist because she will not sell herself, Leon has nonetheless sold himself in his relationship with her. As much as possible within the strictures of the Production Code, their first scene together establishes that Leon is the kept man of an older woman. Not insignificantly, he presents his money-making proposition to Swana solely in terms of how it will benefit him, as if this would be the greatest pleasure that money could offer her: "You remember the platinum watch with the diamond numbers? You'll be in a position to give it to me now." In Leon capitalism is allied to hedonism in that it grows out of a glorification of self, founded on the assumption that self-interest should be at the foundation of social organization.

The film sees a paradox in the capitalist attitude it presents that inversely parallels the Communist paradox I noted above: the hedonistic pursuit of self-interest that turns one's self into a consumerable object is itself self-destructive. There is a sense of disintegration in Leon's character to the extent that he is disassociated from his identity as a product that Swana purchases. Throughout their first scene together, both characters display an inward quality in a single-minded concern for self-gratification that comes close to denying the other's existence: Leon immediately sits himself down and reads a magazine, virtually ignoring everything Swana says, while Swana walks about the room looking into a hand mirror and complaining that her features will not compose themselves this day. There is a near obsessive triviality in these two characters in that, for all their self-absorption, they do not allow themselves any serious emotion.

Swana's later fight for Leon with Ninotchka could point to something deeper in her character, yet in her exchange of the jewels for Leon lies the suggestion that he is another of her possessions, more valuable than the jewels perhaps, but a possession nonetheless. A strongly possessive quality is suggested in their first scene together by Swana's maternal behavior toward Leon: standing, she twice kisses him, holding his head in her hands like that of a little boy and tilting it up to her. Leon's quietly sitting while Swana goes about the room chattering on about her appearance endows him with the little boy complacency of the Maurice Chevalier characters in the early musicals but seen with the more critical dimension of the later films.

Leon is as much of a "swing" character as Ninotchka, with his growth measured in his movement away from this smugness. For this reason, the dramatic conflict in his first scene with Ninotchka centers on his complacent sense of self.

NINOTCHKA: You're very sure of yourself, aren't you?
LEON: Well, nothing's happened recently to shake my self-confidence.
NINOTCHKA: I have heard about the arrogant male in capitalistic society. It is having a superior earning power that makes you that way.
LEON: A Russian! I love Russians! Comrade, I've been fascinated by your Five-Year plan for the last fifteen years.
NINOTCHKA: Your type will soon be extinct.

Ninotchka leaves, triumphing over Leon's irony as she so often does with her ironist-opponents by the direct force of her convictions. The challenge given, Leon looks on astounded, then hails a cab to follow her. From the absolute certainty that he has with Swana, so certain that he can afford to ignore her, he has moved with Ninotchka into an area he does not fully know how to handle.

Garbo's laughing scene is as central to the film as it was to the advertising campaign because it marks not just a transformation in Ninotchka but in Leon as well, the emotional growth of the two characters marked by comedy that is directed against both of them. Ninotchka is initially made fun of for her attempts to impose her own cultural narrowness on others. When she goes into a small workers' restaurant and orders "Raw beets and carrots," the offended proprietor replies, "Madame, this is a restaurant, not a meadow." Leon is laughed at for his pretenses and unbounded self-confidence. When he represents himself to Ninotchka as a familiar of this restaurant, "most at home among workingmen," it is again the proprietor who deflates by welcoming him as a new customer. And the dramatic conflict of the rest of the scene repeatedly asks us to delight in Ninotchka's refusal to laugh at his silly jokes as each refusal leads him more and more into a comically exasperated confusion.

The moment of transformations for both characters occurs simultaneously through complementary losses: as Leon loses his elegance through a pratfall, Ninotchka loses her reserve by laughing. The scene leading up to this moment is presented mostly in two-shot, with just two cut-aways to show responses of other customers to Leon's jokes. Finally, Leon, annoyed with Ninotchka's lack of response, moves away from her table by leaning back in his chair, the camera in a slightly new set-up moving with him to leave Ninotchka out of the frame. He leans against a table he thinks is secure, but falls to the ground amid a clatter of plates and spilled food. There follows a medium reaction shot of a group of workingmen laughing, then a medium shot of Leon on the floor looking up startled, and finally a medium shot of Ninotchka at her table helplessly laughing. It is important that we not see Ninotchka actually burst into laughter because the sudden revelation suggests the full force of a repression being broken through. One moment she is deadly serious, the next dissolved in laughter, and there is really no way to bridge the two states because one is a denial of the other much as Leon's compulsive triviality is a denial of Ninotchka's seriousness.

If Ninotchka changes abruptly here, Leon does as well because the one thing he has taken seriously, his own elegant bearing, has literally been turned topsy-turvy. Notably it is a pratfall that effects the change in both, notably not because this is the only time that Lubitsch joined the contemporary trend of marrying slapstick to high comedy, but because the pratfall brings Leon's attempts at humor down to Ninotchka's proletarian level as well as allowing her to express her hostility to him in a more friendly fashion. Leon is initially all wounded pride as he gets up, dusts off and rejoins Ninotchka at her table. But as she tries once more to suppress her laughter and return to her lunch, he himself suddenly bursts out laughing, finally yielding his own high sense of himself to the absurdity that he had earlier claimed underlies all life. As they are at last united in laughter, the pratfall has bridged the class divisions between them much as it bridged the class divisions of comedy.

The way the laughing scene is shot to suggest the release of a repression illustrates the puritanical aspects of Ninotchka's character. But it must be noted here that she is not at all puritanical about sex, at least not in the conventional sense. She has adopted a matter-of-fact approach to sex that challenges Leon's triviality and compels him to a poetic defense of romantic longing. In her best rationalist manner, Ninotchka accepts sex simply as a fact of life, no more, making it reasonable and in sharp contrast to Lubitsch's sense of the socially disruptive aspects of sex. Ninotchka's rationalism is defeated by laughter because laughter is seen here as an irrational force that transcends any of the reasoned concepts that separate the two characters and challenges Ninotchka's own well-reasoned view of life. The point of laughter is that it is senseless, as Ninotchka later tells Leon:

> NINOTCHKA: Leon, you know the jokes you told me a few days ago? I wake up in the middle of the night and laugh at them. You know, that's wrong. They aren't funny—they're silly.

Laughter may be disruptive when it directs hostility at someone, as it does toward Leon when he falls, but it is also ameliorative in that it brings the two characters together in a mutual sense of absurdity. Ninotchka marks her transformation by putting on a foolscap because she has realized play itself as a life's necessity.

The ideological opposition the film posits between capitalism and communism may finally be seen as an opposition between selfishness and selflessness as capitalism appeals to gratifying self-interest while communism insists on a limitation of self in the interest of the body politic as a whole. This political opposition is given a moral cast when Ninotchka contrasts for the three envoys the cost of the hotel room with a cow, then goes on to her impassioned speech about not having enough money for bread. How can one *morally* afford the luxury of self-indulgence when there are people who cannot even afford the basic necessities of life? While Lubitsch's characters by the time of *Ninotchka* can no longer indulge their irresponsibilities with total immunity, there is another side to this question that creates an unresolvable moral conflict for Lubitsch. Given that man is the animal who plays, how can play be denied without finally denying one's humanity? How can a sense of absurdity be welded to a sense of purpose?

There is a tragic dimension to this conflict that Otis Ferguson took note of when he observed of the ending, "no other was possible short of gloom." Lubitsch is not more politically committed here, but he has accorded fuller balance to the demands of the public sphere against those of the private. The private world itself now suggests a social dimension that can easily translate into political terms, as it does for Leon and Ninotchka when they jointly decide to form a new party:

NINOTCHKA: Let's form our own party.
LEON: Right. Lovers of the world, unite.
NINOTCHKA: And we won't stretch up our arms.
LEON: No! No! No!
NINOTCHKA: And we won't clench our fist.
LEON: No! No!
NINOTCHKA: Our salute will be a kiss.
LEON: Yes, a kiss. Salute!

The scene projects a lightness in the tipsy exultation of the two characters, but there is nothing trivial in their opposition of the union of man and woman as the foundation of every society to societies that grow beyond and threaten the very individual lives that constitute them. In the ideological scheme of the film the lovers form a paradigm for social behavior that is its own ideology in its balancing of self-gratification with a concern for others, selfishness with selflessness. If there is a tragic implication in this, it lies in the impossibility of projecting this perfectly balanced unity from a personal to a social level.

In its view of personal and social behavior, *Ninotchka* presents a kind of double vision that recalls the ending of *The Merry Widow*. Both films contrast private and public resolutions with the two lovers coming together in the isolated space of a jail cell in *The Merry Widow* and a private hotel room in a foreign country in *Ninotchka*. But where *The Merry Widow* ends with the two lovers, *Ninotchka* ends with the public world as the last shot of Ninotchka and Leon embracing dissolves to a sign for the Russian restaurant of Buljanoff, Iranoff, and Kopalski, with only the first two names illuminated. The camera tilts down to reveal Kopalski marching in a sandwich board that declares his two partners are unfair to him. The public world, then, and especially the capitalist public world of private enterprise, continues in a state of conflict that makes the social resolution between the two lovers all the more provisional. With *The Merry Widow* Lubitsch could contrast public and private worlds but chose to end with the private world of the two lovers. By the time of *Ninotchka* the public world had become inescapable even for the most private feelings.

Lubitsch's historical dramas presented characters who were political while the films as a whole were not. In *Ninotchka* the central conflict is itself ideological, but ideological in a fairly broad sense of the term, contrasting whole ways of life alongside political beliefs. The change in approach in *Ninotchka* is not a sudden development, but has its roots in past films. In the costume dramas there is a sense of history, but chiefly as a kind of temporal setting to heighten the emotions of timeless human behavior playing out universal dramas. The process of time as a concern in itself takes on increasingly central importance in the films of the early thirties, but explored strictly in personal and individual rather than social and political terms. If history seemed oddly divorced from time in the dramas, then time was divorced from history in *Trouble in Paradise* and *The Merry Widow*.

In *Ninotchka* time and history are finally allied. Where death hovers over the characters in *Trouble in Paradise* and *The Merry Widow*, in *Ninotchka* it is the calamitous historical event: "Bombs will fall. Civilizations will crumble . . ." The difference in *Ninotchka* is crucial to a change in Lubitsch's vision: if the characters at the end of *The Merry Widow* are prisoners of social conventions, then the characters in *Ninotchka* are finally prisoners of history itself. Human nature, far from being immune to the processes of history as it was peculiarly in the historical dramas, has become for Lubitsch dependent on it. From an extreme emphasis on individual will that dominated his work through the early thirties, Lubitsch has moved to a sense of character as defined by social and historical environment, and the change had produced a direct concern with environment in his later films as something more than colorful background.

It is a central irony of Lubitsch's career that he so often seemed to move toward an expression of escape from the temporal, historical, and social restraints of the world while the world, first in the form of the Depression, then in the Second World War, was quite forcefully too much with him. This tension between the pure wish fulfillment aspect of his films in the desire to escape and the ever-growing sense of an external reality continually threatening a destructive chaos: this unresolvable conflict gives his later films their greater richness.

In the past the external reality could either be ignored, as in some of the comedies of the twenties, abstracted, as in the musicals and the costume dramas, or attacked, as in the two anarchic comedies, because it presented an orderly structure within which the action unfolded. In *Ninotchka*, however, society itself with its rigid ideological tensions is on the verge of collapse, while in *To Be Or Not To Be* it actually collapses. If Lubitsch was able to maintain something of a distance in his observation of political paradox in *Ninotchka*, it is because the world of that film was poised on the brink of collapse. With the falling bombs and crumbling civilizations in *To Be Or Not To Be* Lubitsch finally had to move into an area of commitment. Commitment itself became a norm for the period as Hollywood began going to war long before the rest of the country. But the form that Lubitsch's commitment took was far from the norms of the period and produced the most divided and hostile critical reaction to any Lubitsch film.

8

PLAYING FOR KEEPS

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

To Be Or Not To Be *has caused a lot of controversy and in my opinion has been unjustly attacked. This picture never made fun of Poles, it only satirized actors and the Nazi spirit and the foul Nazi humor. Despite being farcical, it was a truer picture of Naziism than was shown in most novels, magazine stories, and pictures which dealt with the same subject. In those stories the Germans were pictured as a people who were beleaguered by the Nazi gang and tried to fight this menace through the underground whenever they could. I never believed in that and it is now definitely proven that this so-called underground spirit among the German people never existed.—Lubitsch*

That *To Be Or Not To Be* was the only Lubitsch film to give rise to a genuine controversy offers a fair measure of the changes in his later films. Had critics taken the social vision of a film like *Trouble in Paradise* more seriously, they might very well have attacked it for callousness in the particularly playful attitude toward the grim reality of the Depression much as they did attack *To Be Or Not To Be* for its purportedly irresponsible attitude toward war by using the invasion of Warsaw as the backdrop for a comedy. The Depression was there all right in *Trouble in Paradise*, but more as an oblique presence than an actuality. In *To Be Or Not To Be* the war is not only central to the plot, but it is presented with an unflinching directness and concrete realization of the devastation of Poland that made a number of critics very uncomfortable.

As contemporaneous in its subject matter as *Ninotchka*, *To Be Or Not To Be* had a timeliness to it that, like *Ninotchka*, was overtaken by history itself. The attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States entry into the war occurred during the middle of filming, so that what began as the outside observance of a distant conflict was finally released in the fiercely partisan atmosphere of U.S. commitment. Where the outbreak of war in Europe had forced a written introduction to *Ninotchka*, the U.S. entry into the war did produce one change from the final draft of the shooting script: to the voice-over narration which introduced the Polish underground was added the properly bombastic peroration, "Hate, hate, and more hate was the answer to the Nazi terror."* Another factor that possibly affected the contemporary reaction to the film, although not at all as negatively as recent commentary has suggested, is Carole Lombard's death. Lombard, flying back from a massive War Bond drive in the midwest about a month before the film's premiere, was killed in a plane crash. While the accident did force Lubitsch to cut a quip from the final film about a plane, the chief effect Lombard's death had on critics was to make even those who disliked the film sympathetic to her performance.†

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Had he known the full extent of the Nazi horrors, Charles Chaplin has written, he could never have made *The Great Dictator*, a film that influenced *To Be Or Not To Be*. Lubitsch, on the other hand, apparently had no regrets about his anti-Nazi comedy since he continued, as the quotation at the beginning of this chapter indicates, to defend the film until his death. But then Lubitsch could hardly have pleaded ignorance at the time of production as Chaplin did, since even before the United States entry into the war, the Nazi invasion of Warsaw had received ample and condemning coverage in the American press. Chaplin's comedy of terrors fared better with the critics of the time than Lubitsch's, but the difference was not solely a matter of insufficient knowledge on the part of audiences.

For most of its length, Chaplin's film operates in a purely comic universe, one in which storm troopers can be repelled by a few well-aimed whacks of the frying pan. Lubitsch's comic characters, on the other hand, occupy a disturbingly real world where Adolf Hitler is Adolf Hitler and not Adenoid Hynkel, as he is called in *The Great Dictator*, and the only sure way to get rid of a Nazi is to shoot him. Of course Chaplin's film was as much about contemporary Germany as Lubitsch's was about Warsaw, but by making his setting the mythical state of Tomania and granting his characters similarly ludicrous names to complement their slapstick behavior, Chaplin had in effect spread the safety net of comedy under the most breakneck events of the film.

The apparent split in *To Be Or Not To Be* between comic characters and a realistic universe, the sense of consequentiality in the midst of all the flippancy, was particularly disturbing to a number of New York critics who otherwise liked the comedy in the film:

> It has a sly approach, and a cute idea, and if it were laid in any place but Warsaw, it would have been among the best things Lubitsch has ever done. (*New York Morning Telegraph*, March 7, 1942)

Lubitsch's art had come full circle. Having once been criticized for artificiality, triviality, and an inability to apply his distinctive talents to a serious subject, he was now being criticized for an inappropriate realism and a disturbing specificity of setting:

> Not only does he name the city but he lays particular emphasis upon the fact that it has been bombed and ravished, that its people are living in misery and despair. He shows the results of the bombings. He shows the people hungry in the streets. (*New York Times*, March 22, 1942)

There are two dimensions to these attacks: aesthetic, inasmuch as the film violates the conventional methods of comic presentation in an apparent jumbling of modes; and moral, in that a confusion of attitude is read into the confusion of modes.

Lubitsch himself was less confused about mixing modes than his critics, as he replied to attacks on the film:

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*This line is not in the final shooting script on deposit in the library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.

†Tino Balio has suggested Lombard's death as one cause of the film's failure (p. 174). The information on the cut line comes from Warren G. Harris (p. 170).

> I was tired of the two established, recognized recipes, drama with comedy relief and comedy with dramatic relief. I made up my mind to make a picture with no attempt to relieve anybody from anything at any time; dramatic when the situation demands it, satire or comedy whenever it is called for. One might call it a tragical farce or a farcical tragedy—I do not care and neither do the audiences. (*New York Times*, March 29, 1942)

It is probably only in a popular art like the movies that this mixing of modes could be regarded as daring and provoke such a hostile critical reaction. Certainly the fashionability of black comedy as a dramatic form in the intervening years serves to some degree to lessen the shock of this film. Noting that the term "black comedy" had yet to be coined, Herman Weinberg has suggested the lack of understanding about a genre as a reason for the troubled critical reaction to the film. But whether or not there was a name for it, black comedy certainly did attract audiences and critics at the time, as the extraordinary popularity of *Arsenic and Old Lace* on the stage in 1941 demonstrated.

An important difference, nonetheless, with later comedy may be clearly seen by comparison with another black comedy about war, Robert Altman's *M*A*S*H* (1970). While there is more visible brutality and death in Altman's film, there is also the implication in the overriding spirit of disenchantment and disillusionment that nothing counts for very much anyway. "Suicide is painless," a background song constantly reminds the viewer, and for all the spurting blood on the operating tables, there is peculiarly little sense of pain in this film. The world of *M*A*S*H* is a kind of druggy one of total disinterest, and it is this disinterest that finally makes the world, however callous, centrally comic.

To Be Or Not To Be, on the other hand, has a clearer sense of an ordered universe since it opposes two social orders, and as comic as individual characters might be, the opposition of these two orders does in fact have serious consequences for them. Altman's vision is genuinely asocial: Lubitsch, even at his most frivolous, assumes an inevitable social order. A real sense of pain finally sets *To Be Or Not To Be* apart from most black comedy, and the actual dramatic moments in the film, most especially the death of Nazi agent Siletsky (Stanley Ridges), derive their drama from the inescapable sense of consequentiality.

Thanks to the harshly negative criticism of *To Be Or Not To Be*, there is more written record of Lubitsch's attitude toward this film than to any other, much of it offering acute commentary on the work. Having suggested to Bosley Crowther in the *New York Times* that he write a reply to Crowther's original review, then being publicly chided by Crowther in a subsequent article in the *Sunday Times* for not having written the promised response, Lubitsch finally delivered an article that was printed the following Sunday. In it, he accurately summed up the negative attitudes toward the film, which I would like to quote here both to provide an overview of the responses and to indicate Lubitsch's attitudes:

> I am accused of three major sins—of having violated every traditional form in mixing melodrama with comedy-satire or even farce, of endangering our war effort in treating the Nazi menace too lightly, and of exhibiting extremely bad taste in having chosen present-day Warsaw as a background for comedy.

I have quoted above from Lubitsch's response on mixing forms and will have more to say about this matter. For the moment I would like to turn to the objection of bad taste because an exploration of this issue will help clarify the problem of mixed forms.

Lubitsch justified his sense of taste in the film by appealing to the film's audiences: "If I have shown bad taste in playing comedy against a Warsaw background, the audiences who are enjoying that kind of humor are just as guilty." He then goes on to say that movie audiences, while not necessarily sophisticated, do have good taste. On the face of it this might seem a wily attempt to shame Crowther, not for attacking Lubitsch but for attacking his readers. Even considering how limited his popular appeal was, though, I see no reason to doubt Lubitsch's faith in his audience. What he is in fact doing in his argument is throwing out the validity of taste as a critical standard: what defines taste if not a communal subjective response? And if a large portion of an audience responds to a work, is it not then tasteful? Of course, vulgarity, what appeals to the crowd, is normally opposed to tastefulness, but this would make taste an elitist criterion contrary to the tenor of the times. As a popular artist, Lubitsch naturally appealed to audience response because taste is a socially defined standard. Finally, however, the anarchic side of comedy might always seem an affront to good taste, an attempt through laughter to purge bad taste. Laughter, as Bergson claimed, has a "*social* signification," a relevant idea for this film.

Walter Reisch, one of the screenwriters on *Ninotchka* and a friend of Lubitsch, has claimed that the chief source of the negative reaction to *To Be Or Not To Be* was one line given to Sig Ruman as a Nazi colonel, who describes his reaction to a performance of *Hamlet* by Joseph Tura (Jack Benny): "What he did to Shakespeare we are now doing to Poland." Reisch says that after the first preview of the film a number of Lubitsch intimates, including his wife, asked him to cut the line (quoted in Weinberg, pp. 224–25). Reisch might well have considered a line from a script he worked on for Lubitsch when Ninotchka says of the mass trials in the Soviet Union: "There are going to be fewer but better Russians," because in both lines mass murder is being used as the basis for a joke. How can the audience ever respond sympathetically to Ninotchka after this remark? They do, of course, but that has something to do with a compelling sense of the goodness in the character as well as the subsequent change she undergoes. While the lines are somewhat similar in their dubious "taste," the source of the humor is quite different in the two films. In *Ninotchka* the laughter, in somewhat indulgent fashion, is directed against the speaker, allowing the audience to reject one quality in a character who it will find otherwise appealing. In *To Be Or Not To Be* the matter is more complex for the laughter is divided: it is in part directed against the speaker who, in the film's ideological scheme, is a villain, but it is also directed against the listener, who is a hero.

According to Reisch, Lubitsch was adamant about not cutting the Shakespeare–Poland line, defending it as necessary to show the crudity of Nazi humor. While not referring to this line, Lubitsch echoes this argument and expanded on it in the *Times* article:

> I admit that I have not resorted to the methods usually employed in pictures, novels, and plays to signify Nazi terror. No actual torture chamber is photographed, no flogging is shown, no close-up of excited Nazis using their whips and rolling their eyes in lust. My Nazis are different: they passed that stage long ago. Brutality, flogging, and torture have become their daily routine. They talk about it the same way as a salesman referring to the sale of a handbag. Their humor is built around concentration camps, around the sufferings of their victims . . .

This is a reasonable enough defense, but it literally tells only half the story, and in so doing ignores what was genuinely controversial about the film.

Recent critical writing on *To Be Or Not To Be* has tended to exaggerate the extent of the negative response to the film, a trap I do not wish to fall into here. There was in fact a large favorable response as well, and outside of New York City the positive reviews outnumbered the negative.* What is of particular interest is not a head count of yeas and nays, but the extraordinary divergencies of the accounts. For example, the very Shakespeare–Poland line that Crowther among others singled out as an example of the film's tastelessness was itself singled out by the reviewer of *Time* magazine (March 16, 1942), among others, as the funniest line in the film. Indicative of the singular comic strategies of this film is the fact that both Crowther's and the *Time* reviewer's responses are easily justified.

First of all, it must be noted that the form of the joke, wit derived from an implied simile, is familiar enough in Lubitsch, and fairly frequent in the film itself. In form, the line is not very different from an earlier remark by Felix Bressart as the spear-carrier Greenberg to a wildly overacting Lionel Atwill, "Mr. Ravitch, what you are I wouldn't eat." The similarity in form may be seen as a way of pointing up the subsequent crudity of the Nazi's remark by calling attention to the difference in content, and certainly there is an extraordinary callousness in the complacent equation of an actor's ability with the devastation of Poland. On the other hand, once the form has been so firmly established as a source of comedy in this drama, as it has been by frequent use earlier in the film, its repetition alone must automatically signal a laugh.

The line, then, exists in a dual context: if we simply regard the speaker, the remark is crude; but if we consider the listener, the laughter is well-earned because it comes as the culmination of a running gag in which Jack Benny's vain actor, Joseph Tura, in disguise as a Nazi official, has asked a number of Germans if they have ever seen "that great, great Polish actor, Joseph Tura." Since the film has already worked a seemingly infinite number of jokes on Tura's grandstanding ego, the Nazi colonel's deflation can only be as funny as it is devastating, and the chilling equation the joke makes is certainly the most devastating critique of Tura's acting in the film. The divided response that the film encourages with this line is typical of its overall dramatic method, a method that did give rise to the controversy about the film, but is also the source of its dramatic experiment, its complexity and, finally, its brilliance.

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*The Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, New York, has a large collection of clippings from across the nation for this film.

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The divided responses and mixture of modes at the dramatic center of *To Be Or Not To Be* is reflected in virtually every other aspect of the film. In the very casting of the leads, for example, there is a split in the extreme disparateness of type: Lombard, a straight dramatic actress who gained her greatest popularity playing in screwball comedy, seems to exist in a different world from Benny, the only clown-actor ever cast as the lead of a Lubitsch film. Partly as a result of the casting, love has been displaced from the center of this film so that any romantic feeling between these two characters functions simply as a given of the narrative, never to be explored. For all the disparity between these two actors, however, they are unexpectedly united by a complementary split within the individual screen personae of Lombard and Benny.

Lombard in her early career had been considered something of an "elegant clothes horse," since she played parts in heavy romantic dramas where clothing was often the most expressive part of her performance. In 1934 she scored her greatest critical and popular success in *Twentieth Century* by playing a wildly egocentric actress, a part that is clearly echoed by her role in *To Be Or Not To Be*. Back at Paramount, her home studio, she was still cast in romantic dramas until Lubitsch took over as production chief and, it is reported, selected *Hands Across the Table* to take advantage of her newly discovered comedic talents. For the next three years and seven pictures, of which *My Man Godfrey* and *Nothing Sacred* were the most popular, Lombard reigned as the queen of screwball comedy.

To some degree Lombard's success as a comedienne was based on the contradiction between the glamour and beauty of her carefully groomed appearance and the wacky irresponsibility of her behavior; the comedy was screwball because someone who looked as if she should have known better did not. In 1939 when screwball comedy was on the wane, Lombard made an abrupt about-face and acted in four straight dramatic films in a row for the next two years, returning to comedy, peculiarly under the aegis of Alfred Hitchcock, with *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* in 1941, the film immediately preceding *To Be Or Not To Be*. Her experience in comedy improved her ability with drama, endowing these later films with a controlled vitality lacking in earlier dramatic performances, a quality that reflects in quieter tones the exuberance of the comic roles.

In the extreme shifts of her career, Lombard foreshadowed the shifts in mood in *To Be Or Not To Be*. It is probably for this reason that much as the character of Maria Tura is defined by a self-consciously artificial behavior, Lubitsch also used Lombard to signal the film's moments of genuine feeling: the outbreak of the war, for example, is first seen through Maria's reaction, and later she covertly expresses genuine grief when she hears news that implies Tura's death. Because of her ability to provide gossamer shifts from real feeling to irony, Lubitsch uses Lombard, rather than Benny, whose persona remains comic throughout, to provide the transition from the film's two extended dramatic sequences—the invasion of Warsaw and the death of Professor Siletsky—back to a comic tone.

If Lombard's divided personality signals the film's shifts in dramatic mood, then Jack Benny reflects the disparities in comic mode. At the time of the film's release, Benny was one of the most popular performers on radio, but he had never fared particularly well in films because a peculiarity of his comic persona played against the extended narrative framework in the dominant Hollywood style of the period. His most successful performances in movies came in review-type films where he simply repeated his radio personality, while attempts to change character type by casting him in a more conventional romantic comedy like *It's in the Air* (1935) disastrously robbed him of his most distinctive traits. Benny could never be fully at home in romantic comedy because his manner was finally too prissy to permit romance. There is romantic comedy in *To Be Or Not To Be*, but Benny is significantly not at the center of it because he plays something of a *senex* role.

The suggestion of a classical comic type like the *senex* gravitates naturally to Benny because his theatrical personality itself invokes traditional comic vices of stinginess, vanity, and cowardliness. As such, Benny was generally the butt of every other performer's jokes, and yet, oddly, he never fully emerged as a comic villain. On the radio shows the comic villain aspects of his personality were mitigated in two ways: by endowing most of the other characters on the show with a comic vice of their own, and by having Benny frequently tell jokes against himself so that his extreme vanity was colored by an unexpected and mollifying modesty.* There is only one moment in the film that comes close to the self-deflating jokes of the radio shows. Maria has been complaining to Tura that he always steals credit from her. "And if we should ever have a baby," she concludes, "I'm not so sure I'd be the mother." Tura replies, very dryly, "I'm satisfied to be the father." The joke cuts two ways: it both mocks Maria for her sexual looseness at the same time that it mocks Tura for the ease with which he is cuckolded. Laughter that works in this way creates something of a dramatic problem in attitude toward the character: are we laughing with him or at him?

For the radio show, the mixed attitude was necessary to keep Benny at the center of the show by making Jack Benny the performer sympathetic even as Jack Benny the character displayed the most extreme comic vices. In classical comic types, Benny was an *alazon* who could nevertheless stand outside his character and play the *eiron*. He is the

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* According to his biographer Irving A. Fein, Benny regularly began his nightclub and theater acts with a joke that is self-mocking to the point of emasculation, an extreme example of his distinctive humor: "I was born in Waukegan a long, long, *long* time ago. As a matter of fact, our rabbi was an Indian . . . he used a tomahawk. . . . I was eight days old . . . what did I know? I'd like to meet him now. . . . So would Mary." Fein, pp. 7–8.

alazon who not only is *not* driven out, but manages to survive by his long-suffering endurance—hence his extended silences in which he refused to respond to the attacks of others—and by his own ironic wit. The sense of a performer standing outside his character would become more familiar with the absurdist acting style in Hollywood films of the seventies, but was a method difficult to adapt to the predominantly naturalistic style of the thirties and forties that Lubitsch had moved toward. Nevertheless, the screenplay finds a dramatic solution for incorporating the two sides of Benny's personality in a manner that reflects the dramatic divisions in the film itself.

To the extent that Lubitsch was able to use the different sides of Benny he was continuing his experimentation with the *eiron–alazon* opposition I noted in *Ninotchka*, but it is not at all unusual for a sympathetic clown to be defined by comic vices. Both Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd frequently began their films with the laughter directed primarily *against* them, but their plots were generally structured around a movement toward redemption in which growth was achieved through a purging of their comic vices. Bob Hope is perhaps closest to Benny in being defined chiefly through comic vices that were never purged, lechery and cowardliness, but Hope's comedy and the sympathy of his character was based on an inversion, not unlike Falstaff's, that made virtues of his vices. In Benny, the vices always clearly remained vices, and he was the same at the end of the show as at the beginning.

Lubitsch is purported to have told Benny that the part in *To Be Or Not To Be* was written expressly for him, and the role of Joseph Tura does strongly draw on Benny's radio personality. I am particularly interested here in what Lubitsch chose to use from Benny and what he changed in order to produce what one critic called "a surprising amalgamation . . . of Jack Benny of the air-waves—slightly but sufficiently ham—and a Lubitsch character." The comic vices from the radio show have for the most part been singled down in the film to extreme vanity, which has been given greater edge by the elimination of self-irony when Tura is not in disguise. With the increase in vanity, the possibility for cowardliness has been ruled out because the self-dramatizing Tura must always see himself, however inadequate, as the star, the hero of every situation. For this reason, he announces to Maria and Lieutenant Sobinski (Robert Stack) without any knowledge of the ultimate purpose of the mission: "I'm going to meet Herr Siletsky at Gestapo headquarters. And after I've killed him, I hope you'll be kind enough to tell me what it was all about." Paradoxically, Tura's grand ego, that absolute faith in self that the film has constantly invited us to laugh at, enables him in the end to fulfill a heroic function.

While the character of Tura has to some degree been "purified" with the elimination of self-irony to fit into a coherent dramatic structure, the film nonetheless makes use of Benny's manner of standing outside his character and commenting on him by having him play a good deal of the film in disguise so that Tura the actor within the film can comment on the characters he has to play. He is introduced, unbeknownst to the audience, as a character within a play within the movie. Subsequently, in a kind of chiasmus, he first plays Colonel Ehrhardt opposite the real Professor Siletsky, then follows this with a performance of Professor Siletsky opposite the real Colonel Ehrhardt. In disguise, most of Benny/Tura's comedy derives from an irony directed both at the character he is playing and the character he is talking to. But in his own person, Tura remains all *alazon*, and the comedy is for the most part directed *at* him. The contradiction at the center of Benny's persona reflects the film's comic method: alternately *alazon* and *eiron*, he is both subject to comic attacks at the same time that he is the comic attacker of himself and others.

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The experimental nature of *To Be Or Not To Be* that Lubitsch mentioned in his reply to Crowther has to do with the mixing of moods and modes reflected in the casting of Lombard and Benny. To some degree the resulting confusion of attitude may be sorted out—if never entirely untangled—by separating the two plot strands that structure the film's narrative. On the most personal scale the film presents a fairly conventional comic triangle that is revitalized and kept slightly off-balance by one unconventional twist: a vain older man, leading actor Joseph Tura, has an attractive young wife, leading actress Maria Tura, who encourages the attentions of an equally attractive and brave young soldier, as daring and devoted as the husband is egotistical, a Lieutenant Stanislav Sobinski. By the most conventional expectations, the *senex* of a husband deserves to be cuckolded because of the age discrepancy, and much of the comedy about adultery in the film, surprisingly worked beyond the strictures of the Production Code, plays on our sense that Tura himself has invited the cuckoldry through his vanity and ineffectuality. Yet, and here is the film's twist, if Tura is clearly older than his wife Maria, Maria is also clearly older than her very young suitor.

As a result of the age discrepancy, the love scenes between Stanislav and Maria are always more comic than romantic, with the comedy deriving both from Maria's irony in dealing with the puppylike devotion of her suitor and from laughter directed *against* Maria's vanity when she coyly draws out every possible flattery from this flattering young man. Maria replies to Stanislav's hyperbolic compliment about her performance in a comedy with a calculatedly wide-eyed modesty, "Yes, some people thought I was funny." In this remark she combines vanity with an ironic wit directed toward Stanislav that places her on a level of experience beyond the young lieutenant and close to that of her husband. While it is impossible to speak of any romantic feeling between Tura and Maria, there is a mutuality of character that binds them together and can be threatened by Stanislav's foolishly serious intentions. In a conventional plot of this type, the *senex* character would be the greatest fool, but in *To Be Or Not To Be* all three—husband, wife, and suitor—display complementary degrees of folly.

The second plot, an adventure melodrama that moves in a world of spies and counterspies, is introduced right at the moment that the comic plot has reached its only serious crisis with Stanislav's naive desire to confront Tura on his intentions about Maria, an action that could upset the comic equilibrium and plunge the film into a more dramatic conflict in which each of the characters would have to confront the illusions of their own follies. Much as the second plot might seem like an opportune answer to Maria's dilemma of how to get rid of a serious lover she wishes were less serious, there is something of a genre conflict between the two plots: the very same characters who are made foolish by the perspectives of the romantic plot are made heroic by the roles they must assume in the adventure plot in defense of their theater troupe and their country against the Nazi invasion. In its combined genres, the film repeatedly suggests a merging of the heroic with the ridiculous.

Within this two-part scheme, the triangle plot is made subordinate to the adventure story, which makes *To Be Or Not To Be* virtually the only Lubitsch film in which love is displaced from the center of the narrative. Even the pacifistic theme in *The Man I Killed* is oddly worked out through a romance, while the political conflict in *Ninotchka* is embodied in the lovers' conflict. Romantic comedy *is* important to *To Be Or Not To Be,* but only as a means of defining a normality which the war interrupts. On the most abstracted level of plot, the opposition between romantic comedy as a signifier of the ordinary and melodrama as a signifier of the disruption of war brings *To Be Or Not To Be* close to one of the most popular films of the Second World War, William Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver,* released only three months after the Lubitsch film and as praised for its good taste, restraint, and sensitivity as *To Be Or Not To Be* was excoriated for its tastelessness.

Both *To Be Or Not To Be* and *Mrs. Miniver* might be described as "home-front" dramas inasmuch as they focus on the responses to war of characters who are not for the most part directly involved in fighting. Both films begin in a comic world before moving into the more tragic environment of wartime, in each the comic world serving to define a normality that will be disrupted by the war. Finally, in both the outbreak of war enables seemingly unheroic characters to reveal under the force of circumstances an unexpected heroism. Presenting the two films in this manner no doubt makes them seem more similar than any actual viewing experience would, but this similarity in structure is worth pointing out both to show how Lubitsch is appealing to certain modes which had become norms of the period, and also how in his differing treatment he is departing from them.

The normal world of *Mrs. Miniver* is the isolated environment of the English upper middle class, and the comedy it provides in the opening is of the gentlest sort imaginable or, as a critic of the time put it, "a succession of delightfully human touches" (*New York Journal-American,* June 4, 1942). Mrs. Miniver is discovered buying a hat she can't really afford at the same time that Mr. Miniver is buying a sports car that he can't really afford, after which they are brought together to explain to each other their respective buying sprees and discover that with a little belt-tightening they really can afford what they couldn't afford. Now that consumeritis has become a common topic for comedy, this material must seem particularly ripe for satiric treatment, yet there is not a trace of satire here. If anything, the comedy is of an indulgent, defusing nature, a mode that is meant to make us identify with these characters and their trivial everyday worries. Had the potential for satire been realized, the resulting film would be remarkably close to the disturbing tone of *To Be Or Not To Be,* where the world of normality in the prologue presents a group of characters who are meant to be laughed at, and not at all indulgently. But *Mrs. Miniver* had a more sentimental goal in its eulogizing the innate gallantry and fortitude the best of the middle class is able to discover in itself in the worst of times, a view that had to be more appealing to an American audience than that of *To Be Or Not To Be* after the U.S. entry into the war.

And yet, paradoxically, the very aspects of attitude in the Lubitsch film that some critics found so disquieting do reflect changes in Lubitsch's art that show it moving in the more democratic direction of film comedy at the time. The tone of his films was made more democratic by Lubitsch's inversion of his own past comic methods. If any attempt is made to align the characters of *To Be Or Not To Be* with their closest types in, say, *Trouble in Paradise,* then Jack Benny is something of a descendant of both Charlie Ruggles and Edward Everett Horton, while the Nazi villain of Stanley Ridges represents a development of the suave control of Herbert Marshall's Gaston. While *Trouble in Paradise* explicitly condemns the idiot aristocrats of Ruggles and Horton, the film is nonetheless implicitly elitist for a reason I had mentioned in chapter 6: any comedy which sets a hero in opposition to society and has him triumph over it expresses an elitist view. Yet the hero set in opposition to society is one of the most common formulas of comedy, and comic directors who consciously sought to present a democratic vision—once again, preeminently and most importantly for Lubitsch, they were Chaplin and Capra—were faced with something of a paradox in the very form of their art.

This paradox is most richly realized in the figure of Chaplin's tramp, the social outcast who at the same time presents a more perfect realization of society's most positive values than any social insider. The tramp might have represented values that we the audience could accept, which is why we accept him, but they were always at odds with the dominant society of his films. Chaplin kept the paradox constant: the tramp by virtue of being a tramp remained apart from the dominant society within the film, at the same time that he never really challenged the collective values of his audience. The underlying vision of his films was an extreme individualism that sought to transcend class by making his aristocratic bum classless. As Capra was more oriented toward communal values, his democratic solution to the implicit elitism of comedy necessarily had to take a different form.

In *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) James Stewart's Mr. Smith is a naif, the butt of jokes for more sophisticated society. To the extent that the film starts off with a series of jokes directed against a character who also serves as the chief repository of our sympathies, *Mr. Smith* foreshadows *To Be Or Not To Be*. But it is also clear halfway into the film that the source of Mr. Smith's foolishness, his naive idealism, is also the character's greatest virtue, and as such is seen to be superior to the corrupt cynicism of Washington society. Capra tries to mute the implicit elitism in the elevation of Mr. Smith by a repeated insistence that Mr. Smith, for all his saintly singularity, is still to be taken as a representative character. He is not an outsider who manages to rise above a despicable society, but a member of a class of people, or more in line with the terms of the film, a class of boys, that is superior in its values to the class he now finds himself dealing with.

Capra's Mr. Smith is as much defined by class as Chaplin's tramp is not, and yet the methods of both Capra and Chaplin may be found in Lubitsch's handling of the democratic-elitism paradox in *To Be Or Not To Be*. Lubitsch's actors, like Chaplin's tramp, are individualists to the point of solipsism, yet like Capra's Mr. Smith, in battle with their enemies, they represent an entire group. While the Nazis in *To Be Or Not To Be* regard themselves as superior beings, the dramatic form of the film places the group of actors, however much they are laughed at as individuals, in a superior position *as a group*. Because of the resulting double perspective on character that criticizes at the same time that it ennobles, Lubitsch's actors can never fully emerge as the natural aristocrats of Chaplin and Capra or, for that matter, of characters in the earlier Lubitsch films. In the final analysis, Lubitsch is more insistent on the commonness of his common men.

The Great Dictator was the first film in which Chaplin dealt critically with the innate egotism of his screen persona, but he did it by dividing the persona into two characters: the familiar tramp, now as a Jew allied to a social group, which he had never been in the past, and Adenoid Hynkel, who is all ego. There does remain a strong element of solipsism in the tramp's character even in this film, but it is conveniently excused by the plot device of amnesia: if he remains apart from his social-racial group, it is not because of his egotism, but rather because the course of history has passed him by. Lubitsch is similarly concerned with the insane ego of Hitler, and his parody of Nazi manners draws on Chaplin, yet all of the sympathetic characters in his film are egotists, with no excuses as those offered for the Tramp, so that a less starkly defined dialectic emerges than that of *The Great Dictator*.

Leo McCarey's *Once Upon a Honeymoon* was produced a year after *To Be Or Not To Be* and was in turn influenced by it, right down to borrowing an establishing shot of Warsaw from the earlier film. But it is really closer to Chaplin in that the line between virtue and vice is similarly drawn with great clarity of a kind that made both the McCarey and Chaplin films easier for critics to like than the Lubitsch. *Once Upon a Honeymoon* begins with Ginger Rogers as a former American burlesque star passing herself off as an English aristocrat in order to marry Austrian aristocrat Walter Slezak, who is himself in secret a Nazi agent. As she does not see the actual work

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of her husband, Rogers' aristocratic pretensions are tied explicitly to political ignorance, both of which she has to pay for by leaving aristocratic husband Slezak for man-of-the-people Cary Grant. Rogers the pretender-aristocrat of the first half of the film is the butt of jokes, while a sympathetic and compassionate treatment is accorded Rogers the honest American of the second half when she learns to accept the innate democratic spirit she had been suppressing in her personality.

In both the Chaplin and McCarey films the nature of the Nazi villainy is clear enough, but the virtues of the democrats are ill-defined, presented in forceful but vague appeals to generalized ideals like the brotherhood of man, appeals that are more oratorical than dramatic, more talked about than shown. In both films, the ideals are simply givens, virtues that an American audience can accept without question so that they need not be dramatized. But it is precisely because *To Be Or Not To Be* explores the social structure and values of its democrats as well as that of its fascists that it is the more thoroughly and cogently political work.

All the comedy in *To Be Or Not To Be* of egos constantly bumping into each other must be seen as central to the film's democratic concerns because any question of individual desires versus group desires must be seen as central to democratic principles. At root, the democrats of Chaplin, McCarey, and Capra are really aristocrats in the nobility of their aspirations, much as the middle-class characters in Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver* finally emerge as true aristocrats under the force of history. History similarly compels the actor-fools of *To Be Or Not To Be* into heroic actions, but the heroism is always partly undercut by the deflating comedy that remains constant throughout the film.

In its playing with comic modes, *To Be Or Not To Be*, like *Ninotchka* before it, emerges a film as much about the nature of comedy as it is about politics; and the two become oddly intertwined. Bergson noted the importance of context in determining laughter when he wrote: "how often has the remark been made that many comic effects are incapable of translation from one language to another, because they refer to the customs and ideas of a particular social group." Lubitsch implicitly recognized this aspect of laughter when he wrote in the Sunday *Times:*

> . . . the American audiences don't laugh at these Nazis because they underestimate their menace, but because they are happy to see this new order and its ideology ridiculed. They have no sympathy with men who jump out of a plane without parachutes because a man with a little mustache says "Jump!" They have contempt for people who get a perverted pleasure out of such serfdom.
>
> I am positive that that scene wouldn't draw a laugh in Nazi Germany. It gets a big laugh in the United States of America. Let's be grateful that it does, and let's hope it always will.

Context is a clear determinant for comedy, but in this case Lubitsch, like Bergson, is appealing to a context which exists outside the film. The film itself is strongly concerned with creating its own contexts, for which reason it is not willing to settle for the generalized appeals I noted in the Chaplin and McCarey films.

A sense of differing contexts is of course created through the constantly shifting comic and dramatic modes of the film, but context as a determinant of meaning is more precisely defined through the film's most striking structural device, repetition. The very title of the film points to repetition in the reiterated gag of the viewer who walks out on Hamlet's soliloquy. But this joke represents an unusual constant in the film, an indicator of a normal train of events, while repetition is more often used to signal a shift in context and a resultant shift in tone. To take the other Shakespeare quotation used in the film, the Rialto speech from *The Merchant of Venice,* each time it appears, it establishes a new mood: first purely comic as a ham spear carrier imagines himself grandiosely in a leading role; second, following the invasion of Warsaw with an emphasis on the pathos of the monologue as the spear carrier speaks for defeated Poland; third, with an emphasis on revenge, a strength and anger replacing the earlier defeatism. In each case the new tone is derived as much from circumstances and setting as it is from Felix Bressart's brilliantly shaded line-readings, so that while the words are generally the same, the emotions behind them are entirely different on each repetition.

Comedy is partly a matter of attitude, as context determines the different ways of responding to identical events. Consider the opening of the film: a montage of shop signs, each sign read aloud by a voice-over narration and each name on the signs ending in "-ski." The world at the beginning of the film with its wide array of shops is as fully bourgeois as that of *The Shop Around the Corner*, while the tone of the film is lightly mocking by virtue of Lubitsch's witty indirect scene-setting and the visually "rhyming" shots of signs. The method for showing the invasion of Warsaw is similarly indirect, and there is even the same rhyming quality that would ordinarily establish a lightness to the whole scene, but the context deprives the sequence of any humor: the very same signs are shown, but this time partly destroyed, with glimpses of bombed-out buildings visible behind them.

Context as a determinant of attitude is not simply a method of the film, but central to its thematic concerns. It provides the keynote to the opening scene in which the comedy derives from an incongruous relationship of character to setting: in prewar Warsaw, Adolf Hitler suddenly appears in full military uniform standing all by himself in front of Mr. Maslowski's delicatessen. The fact that the scene is to be taken as comedy is established from the outset by the absurdly overdramatic style of the narration, but at the center of the comedy is the absurdity of Hitler divorced from his proper context: without his hierarchy under him, he is a ridiculous strutting figure, just, in the words of the narrator, "a little man with a mustache."

The Hitler in this case is actually an actor performing in an anti-Nazi play at the Teatr Polski and trying to convince his director that his impersonation of Hitler is an expert one. Denied this information, which is only revealed in the third scene, the audience is made to see the event in a false context. The introduction to the film's villain is in fact introducing the film's heroes, an apparent confusion that is in line with the complexity of attitude that can be felt in the film's comedy. Because this presentation of the villains by means of the heroes creates a context through which we will perceive the actual Nazis, and because elements from this scene will be repeated in differing contexts throughout the rest of the film, I would like to look at this first dialogue scene in some detail.

After the voice-over narration deceptively seeks to explain Adolf Hitler's presence in downtown Warsaw by saying, "It all began in Gestapo headquarters," the scene shifts to an interrogation of a young boy by two Gestapo officers who seek information of traitorous behavior by the boy's father. The interrogation is disrupted by the arrival of Adolf Hitler, who responds to the almost infinite number of "Heil Hitler!"s that greet him with a "Heil myself!" At this point, there is a cut looking out from a stage toward a theater with the general director of the theater, Dobosh (Charles Halton), sitting at a table with a script before him. He slams shut the script, says, "That's not in the script, Mr. Bronski" and walks over to the Gestapo set, the camera moving with him so that we can now see that this Gestapo headquarters is in fact located on a stage. The sudden revelation that this is a play means of course that we are no longer to take it as something actually happening. But even when it was first, deceptively, presented to us as a reality, the level of seriousness in the scene was not certain. For one thing, simply the presence of Jack Benny would indicate to a contemporary audience a comic world even if Benny did in fact play a Nazi and that world was the Gestapo.* But there is also comedy here which works *within* the false context and lingers on even after the context has been revealed as false.

The comedy in this scene revolved implicitly around theater even before its actual theatrical nature is revealed because comic points are made about role playing and formal behavior. Benny's first response to his adjutant's "Heil Hitler!" is a halfhearted salute as he continues to read some papers on his desk and a "Heil" in return muttered through a yawn. Then, a second later as if suddenly remembering his proper role, he snaps to attention and says, "Heil Hitler!" with a vigor equal to that of the adjutant. His second "Heil" is theatrical in the sense that it conceals his actual emotions as much as his first "Heil" had inadvertently revealed them. The comedy in the scene deflates ritual forms of behavior in two ways. Either they are shown to be overblown: a character named Wilhelm Kuntzie is summoned to be interrogated through a series of impressively echoing commands, but instead of the fearsome criminal that the style of summoning conjures up, a little boy calmly enters the room. Or they may be shown to be purely mechanical: the adjutant, who has just revealed knowledge of an anti-Hitler joke, gets out of this compromising situation with a well-timed "Heil Hitler!" which causes his superior to stop questioning him because proper Nazi behavior dictates that every Nazi salute must be immediately greeted by another Nazi salute.

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*Nonetheless, Irving Fein reports that Benny's father, overcome with shock, immediately walked out of the theater when Benny first appeared in the film in Nazi uniform (p. 72).

Henri Bergson has suggested that a major source of laughter is "automatism" and "inelasticity," behavior that presents man as a machine, a notion that is relevant here inasmuch as the comic point of all the "Heil"s is their purely mechanical quality. One "Heil" must always engender another, a process that is carried out *ad absurdum* at the conclusion of this scene when the adjutant's "Heil," uttered to defend himself, appears to lead to a whole series of off-screen "Heil"s each one seemingly echoing the other. The off-screen salutes are in fact greeting the arrival of Hitler, but since we, as well as the characters within the scene, are initially denied this information, we are led to interpret the salutes as a response to the on-screen "Heil"s. A causal chain is established with one greeting producing another and another and another, a chain that can find its only logical conclusion, as it finally does here, in a "Heil myself!" By its very mechanical quality, the "Heil Hitler" ritual suggests a behavioral mode in which form is divorced from feeling by the subjugation of human nature to an overruling hierarchical pattern.

The sudden revelation that this scene has all been theater has no direct effect on the comic points of the scene inasmuch as it makes the events in memory neither more nor less funny. But the comic meaning of the scene is made more forceful by the revelation as it brings out explicitly the point of theatricality that is implicit in all the comedy of the scene. The sudden shift in context at this point provides the film's starkest rupture between appearance and reality, but in so doing it keys the audience to examine all political events through the rest of the film from a context that exists outside the most apparent one. The fact that what is initially presented as a political reality, however comic, should *by an abrupt shift in context* be transformed into a theater piece has the effect of infecting all later political scenes in the film with an inescapable theatricality.

The main thrust of the film's repetitions is to provide a constant sense of performance as real political life almost insistently imitates theatrical art. When Tura, disguised as Professor Siletsky, visits the real Colonel Ehrhardt at the real Gestapo headquarters, he suddenly finds himself in much the same dramatic position he was in at the beginning when Ehrhardt repeats the same joke from the anti-Nazi play about Hitler. Siletsky/Tura indicates his displeasure over the joke, and, in an unknowing imitation of the adjutant in the play, Colonel Ehrhardt gets out of his embarrassment with a well-placed "Heil Hitler!" which produces the requisite response from Siletsky/Tura. Having already played Colonel Ehrhardt for the real Siletsky, Tura borrows some of Siletsky's dialogue from their scene together, which in retrospect makes even the real Siletsky of that scene something of a theatrical creation. Siletsky/Tura informs Ehrhardt that in London he is known as "Concentration Camp Ehrhardt." Ehrhardt responds, laughing, "So they call me Concentration Camp Ehrhardt!" a line that Tura had used repeatedly in his earlier meeting with Siletsky. Tura replies, appropriately with a double meaning that shifts depending upon the context in which it is understood, "I thought you'd react that way."

The dramatic interest in both scenes in which Professor Siletsky meets Colonel Ehrhardt—the names remain the same in both, but the people are different—focuses on the success of Tura's respective impersonations, but the sense of performance that is explicit with Tura necessarily carries over to his interlocutors. In the first scene a good deal of what Siletsky says consists of common formulas of politeness, an apparent interest in Colonel Ehrhardt/Tura, the situation in Warsaw, but all presented with an unstated purpose of bringing the meeting to a close as quickly as possible so that he may return to his assignation with Maria at the hotel. In the second scene the real Ehrhardt is always acting to ingratiate himself with the false Siletsky, which is finally what makes him such easy prey for the ironies of Tura. When Ehrhardt tries to dismiss the apparent ineptness of his assistant Captain Schultz with the remark, "After all, what can you expect from a man who doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, doesn't eat meat?" Tura deftly turns this line of defense into an offense by inquiring with apparent innocence, "You mean like our Fuehrer?"

Most of the examples I have cited so far consist of forms of polite social behavior which, as such, represent social role playing and theatricality that find clear antecedents in earlier Lubitsch films. What is different here, however, is a context that insistently transforms the theatrical behavior into distinctly political behavior.* In a reversal that produces a peculiar echoing effect resounding through the rest of the film, the theatrical pieces at the beginning are presented by virtue of the narrator's deception in purely political terms while the film's major political action, the invasion of Warsaw, is presented in theatrical terms. When the invasion begins, one of the members of the acting company remarks, "the Nazis are putting on the show now—and a much bigger one," to which Maria replies, "And there's no censor to stop them," a bitter reference to the fact that the Polish government had earlier censored the troupe's anti-Nazi play as part of an attempt to appease the Germans. When the invasion finally reaches its devastating conclusion, it is commented on by a voice-over narration as if it represented the end of a stark theater piece: "The curtain had fallen on the Polish drama, a tragedy with no relief in sight."

Politics and theater intersect in *To Be Or Not To Be* because both deal in the value of appearances. It is the Nazi's show of force that establishes them as the rulers of Poland, and it is against this show that the actors must act by creating their own show. The identity of Hitler as an impostor must be kept secret in the opening so that the notion of politics as a form of display may be presented in all the absurdity of a lone Hitler preening before a group of startled Polish pedestrians. Appearance is a primary facet of political activity for Lubitsch not because ideology is a secondary concern but because ideology grows out of manners of appearance. When Professor Siletsky

is trying to woo Maria to the Nazi cause as well as to his bed, he initially presents his arguments in purely pragmatic terms that grow out of his sense of theater: "In the theater it's important that you choose the right part. In real life you must choose the right side." Conviction itself is not so important as the appearance of conviction, as political behavior spells a theatrical opportunism.

If politics, as the film insists, is inherently theatrical, then the Nazi political hierarchy exists as a form of theater whose dramatic purpose is to exalt itself and the man at its zenith. In a totalitarian system built on the assumption that one man's needs are more important than another's, Hitler is the ultimate ham actor. The all-devouring ego of Hitler finds its clearest cinematic ancestor in Chaplin's Adenoid Hynkel, but put to a very different purpose in the Lubitsch film: it is precisely at the point of egotism that the theatrical characters of the film intersect with the political ones, and it is this intersection that endows the film with its distinctive complexities and tensions.

All the world may be a stage, but the only players here are soldiers, politicians, and actors. The fact that a serious conflict was cast in terms of a second-rate theater company battling Nazis gave rise to the charges of trivializing leveled against the film. Lubitsch was partly answering this when he claimed that the film was not to be taken about Poles generally, but only about actors who displayed similar traits of foolishness the world over. Yet there is as much a sense of microcosm in this acting troupe as there was in the group of salespeople in *The Shop Around the Corner.* Appropriately, the transition to the scene of "reality" in the theater after the opening deception is handled with the same kind of integrating camera movement used in the earlier film to show the unity of the group: the camera moving with Dobosh as he joins the group of actors in the scene, then cutting to Greenberg and moving with him as he walks up to Dobosh and the other actors. In both films the movement emphasizes the presence of the individual within the group, how he serves to make up the group, at the same time that it makes the group the center of these characters' lives. The primacy placed on the group of actors *as a group* is important because on an individual basis these actors are almost obsessively self-absorbed.

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* Because he refuses to consider the political aspect of the film's narrative, Graham Petrie arrives at the peculiar conclusion that a central theme of the film is "the need to take, even if only for a few moments, the leading role in life, to have others admire you for what you *really* are underneath the inadequate and misleading façade circumstances normally force you to present to the world." (*Film Comment,* May–June 1974).

The first scene with the actors as themselves, that is as actors, provides the sharpest contrast with the Nazi world where all individual will is subordinated to an inviolable hierarchy. There is something of a hierarchy in the theater as well in that director Dobosh has the authority to condemn Hitler-Bronski's inspired improvisation on the script. But if this first conflict with an actor's imagination makes Dobosh's authority far from supreme, any claim to authority among this group of actors faces a constant challenge from any member of the troupe. When spear-carrier Greenberg asks Dobosh if he would like to hear his opinion on Bronski's improvisation, Dobosh sternly replies, "No, Mr. Greenberg, I do not want to hear your opinion." Greenberg immediately counters with, "All right, then, let me give you my reaction," the very rhythmic repetition in phrasing making Greenberg's pronouncement as unstoppable as it is inevitable. In contrast to the perfectly ordered world of the Nazis, the acting troupe presents a nearly anarchic collection of messily uncontrolled egos.

Hitler might be the supreme egotist in the world of this film, but his egotism finds a sharp reflection in the behavior of the actors. As the victims are allied with their oppressors by this single trait, the two dramatic modes of the film, comedy and suspense, find their appropriate thematic nexus in egotism. When Dobosh finishes his instructions to Tura on how to act Colonel Ehrhardt for Professor Siletsky, he neatly sums up the dramatic and comic tensions in the ensuing scene: "I hate to leave the fate of my country in the hands of a ham."

Acting involves a paradox in that it demands a form of self-denial as the actor submerges his own personality in a part at the same time that the part is undertaken for a self-aggrandizement that is fed by the audience's applause. As the greatest ham in the company, Ravitsch presents the paradox in boldest relief. His bravura self-displays before real Gestapo officers as if he were seeking praise of his performance expands self-aggrandizement to the insane point of self-destructiveness: if the audience for whom he is playing with such strenuous effort were to realize that he is in fact acting, it would applaud by killing him.

Acting is a way of splitting accepted levels of reality: there is a reality in the form of another self behind the performance at the same time that the performance can only succeed if it manages to present its own appearance of reality. Even so, that appearance of reality is clearly a fiction that is mutually entered into by actor and audience alike. The different levels of reality on which we experience theater are most startlingly realized in *To Be Or Not To Be* at the moment of Professor Siletsky's death on the stage of the Teatr Polski viewed by the troups of actors standing in the theater. While the audience of actors in the theater is transfixed by the sight of an actual death on their stage that had previously witnessed hundreds of faked deaths, we in the movie audience can only accept the death of Professor Siletsky, the character within the world of the film's fiction, because we know that the actor Stanley Ridges does not die at this moment.

Inasmuch as the actors operate within a reality set apart from ordinary reality, they have an advantage over their political adversaries because they are the only characters in the film who have the perception of a split reality. For this reason, no matter how foolish they may appear in their grand egotism, they can also always function as ironists who see more than they allow. The politicians on the other hand are actors who must at all costs conform to their outward appearances. *To Be Or Not To Be*, somewhat like *Ninotchka*, uses manners as a means of defining an ideology of puritanism as the Nazi way of life insists on the outward conformity of all inner impulses. Because the actors perceive a split between surface behavior and inner feeling, they most fully understand the *dramatic* role of manners in the theater of everyday life and are generally able to manipulate them with a well-timed "Heil Hitler!" to the disadvantage of their Nazi counterparts.

While Siletsky first appears as an imposter in the guise of a Polish patriot who befriends the Polish squadron of the RAF, he is nonetheless the most unified character in the film, the one who seems to have most fully integrated outward manner with inner desire. He is a satanic Ninotchka, as selflessly dedicated to his inhumane ideal as she is to her humanistic one. Unlike Ninotchka, he is granted no awakening, no sense of life beyond the coldly impenetrable surface, so that the wholeness of his character becomes its most disturbing quality. I suggested earlier that Siletsky could find his closest ancestor in earlier films in Gaston from *Trouble in Paradise*: in both, the impeccable manners may be seen as a sign of quiet ruthlessness in that Gaston manipulates those around him as much for his own selfish ends as does Siletsky. As Lubitsch has moved away from the individual to a greater emphasis on the group as a sustaining force, he can no longer celebrate the kind of aggressive individualism of Gaston with its triumphant domination of everyone around him as a positive value.

Furthermore, there is a strong sense in *To Be Or Not To Be* for the first time in a Lubitsch film that an impeccably suave and unruffable surface might in fact conceal nothing. Siletsky's attempted conversion of Maria presents the sharpest view of his character as well as the film's most explicit attack on Nazi ideology:

MARIA: Naturally, this is all very attractive and tempting—but what are we going to do with my conscience?

SILETSKY: Life could be made very comfortable for you again, Mrs. Tura. We will convince you that you're going to serve the right cause. I wonder if you really know what Nazism stands for.

MARIA (*dryly*): I have a slight idea.

SILETSKY: In the final analysis all we're trying to do is create a happy world.

MARIA (*breathless*): And people who don't want to be happy have no place in this happy world. Well, that makes sense.

SILETSKY: We're not brutal. We're not monsters. Now tell me, do I look like a monster?

MARIA (*with a girlish giggle*): Oh, of course not, Professor.

SILETSKY: You say that as though you meant it.

MARIA: I do.

SILETSKY: We're just like other people. We love to sing, we love to dance. We admire beautiful women. We are human (*touching her hand*)—and sometimes very human.

MARIA: I am convinced of that.

SILETSKY: Why don't you stay for dinner. I couldn't think of anything more charming, and before the evening is over, I'm sure you'll say "Heil Hitler!"

Politics might make strange bedfellows, but Siletsky's attempted seduction of Maria is not a reduction of all political behavior to sexual motivation. Rather, given the manner of Siletsky's character, there is the possibility that sex itself is subsumed under political activity. He tempts Maria with self-interest, yet we are never allowed to penetrate to any self-interest on his part: he is always the company man. And while protesting to Maria that he is human like anyone else, he is concurrently pressing his seduction solely in political terms, implicitly treating orgasm as the moment when she will cry out her Fuehrer's name.

Siletsky is the one character in the film who is like the Nazis Lubitsch described in his *Times* article, so inured to the horrors of the regime that he has become something like a businessman in his response to them. But he only represents half the view of Naziism here, the other half being portrayed by Colonel Ehrhardt, who does not appear, except in Tura's prescient impersonation of him, until after Siletsky's death. With the shift to Ehrhardt there is a significant shift in the film's tone as well: the Nazis become more comic characters, the kind the critics at the time objected to, the comedy itself becomes more farcical, and the pacing is accelerated. For all the power he has over subordinates like Captain Schultz and the great number of Polish patriots he has shot without qualm, Ehrhardt as a member of the lower echelons can be easily defeated by pulling rank. Siletsky in his wholeness is finally beyond the ironies of the actors with their understanding of a split reality. The force he represents sitting as close as he does to the top of the hierarchy can only be defeated by like force: he must be killed by a soldier, Lieutenant Sobinski, the only character on the side of the good guys who is never ironic.

Because Siletsky is the greatest threat to the actors, his death occupies the dramatic and thematic center of the film. The actors have taken their performances out into the real world, but this is the first and only time in the film that the outside reality invades the world of make-believe. In a back room of the theater made over to look like Gestapo headquarters, Siletsky has been passing on information about the Polish underground to Ehrhardt/Tura. Finally seeing through Tura's impersonation, Siletsky pulls a gun on him and asks, "Did you ever play a corpse, Mr. Tura?" a line that displays a level of wit typical of the character in its deadly seriousness. Making Tura stand facing a wall, Siletsky runs out a door into the main auditorium. Gun shots are heard, and Tura, thinking he has been shot, raises his right arm in salute, shouting out, "Long live Poland!" A second after, he feels behind his back and discovers, as the audience has been able to see all the time, that he has not in fact been shot.

The rest of the company is searching for Siletsky in the auditorium. Spotlights are turned on and move wildly about in a pattern that suggests searchlights scanning the sky during an air-raid. Finally Siletsky is spotted on the stage in the glow of a spotlight. He runs behind the curtain, and Dobosh yells for someone to go backstage and raise the curtain. Just as the curtain is about to rise up, the camera, which has been surveying the last activity from a high angle long shot, shifts to a vantage point over the actor's heads in the foreground as they stand in the auditorium looking toward the stage, making them an audience for the play which the rising curtain signals is about to begin. A shot is heard, the curtain rises and in the *Hamlet* set appears the following scene: Lieutenant Sobinski stands upstage with a gun in his hand while Siletsky leans against a table downstage clutching his side. He raises his left arm in a Nazi salute, begins to say "Heil Hitler," but before he can get it out, he falls over and dies.

As the real world irrevocably invades the theater at this moment, there is nevertheless a strong sense of theatricality in the actions. One of the most brilliantly evocative repetitions in the film comes with the two salutes. Tura's salute is treated comically: we are given a distance from the character because we know he has not been shot when he thinks he has, so we can see the salute as egocentric grandstanding in the familiar Tura style. The comic treatment of Tura's salute necessarily colors the way we view Siletsky at the moment of his death. There is no heroic posturing as there is with Tura, and he cannot utter his entire salute, but this inability grants it a seriousness that is literally deadly. With his last words, Siletsky retains a frightening wholeness even in his death as he had in life, while Tura's salute points to the usual split in his character. Is on-stage Siletsky acting at this point, or is this the extent of his real feelings? It is because of the shell-like nature of the man that his corpse can subsequently serve Tura as a theatrical prop in a little performance he must stage for Ehrhardt.

We have previously seen two sets from the Teatr Polski, and while the Gestapo set might seem the more likely for the events being "staged" in this scene, the murder of Siletsky actually takes place in the set from *Hamlet*, where we have twice seen Tura begin his soliloquy. To the extent that the soliloquy enunciates a revenge theme, questioning if action should be taken against a supposed evil, the setting is an appropriate place to dispatch Siletsky. But there is something more here as the action presents an irreversible reality within a setting that has witnessed a large number of pretended deaths. The playing which in the past had been merely playing now takes on real consequences. Action becomes a risk to existence, a direct involvement in the world that playing always keeps at a distance: to be or not to be is a central question for all the characters involved in this action against Siletsky.

The title of the film may be given another meaning that contrarily elevates playing to the most direct involvement with the real world. All Lubitsch characters might play, but never before have they had to play for such high stakes. In the context of a real war, playing itself becomes a matter of existence: to be or not to be is made synonymous with to play or not to play, as the war compels characters to play in real life roles they had once played on the stage. Maria dryly notes the difference when Siletsky offers her the part of a Nazi spy in real life which is similar to a role she once played on the stage:

> "I got shot in the last act. I suppose that happens to most spies . . . You know, Professor, if you die in the theater, afterwards you get up and take a bow. But if you die in real life—afterwards you're dead."

If Ninotchka has achieved a temporary release in play from the pressing concerns of the world and her commitments, then the characters of *To Be Or Not To Be* must make their commitments, must confront the real world though their play. *To Be Or Not To Be* is certainly one of the most deadly serious titles ever given a comedy, but the film warrants it.

The two films that followed *To Be Or Not To Be* seem to present something of a retreat from its political concerns and those of *Ninotchka* much as *The Merry Widow* had seemed to retreat from the anarchism of the two comedies before it. *To Be Or Not To Be* is Lubitsch's most thoroughly political film; and while *The Great Dictator* and *Once Upon a Honeymoon* are as overtly concerned with similar political questions, Lubitsch's film seems to me the greater achievement by its concentration on the interactions of social groups, its analysis of conflicting social orders. If Lubitsch subsequently seems to withdraw from these concerns, almost as if in anticipation of death, the historical sense fully developed and matured in *Ninotchka*, *The Shop Around the Corner*, and *To Be Or Not To Be* continues to be felt strongly in his last two films.

PART FOUR

THE TRANSCENDENTAL VISION

1942-1947

9

FAMILY LIVES

HEAVEN CAN WAIT AND *CLUNY BROWN*

When Lubitsch began working at Twentieth-Century Fox in 1942, the studio was jokingly known in Hollywood as "Sixteenth-Century Fox" because of its predilection for costume films. Lubitsch's first film for Fox, *Heaven Can Wait*, was obligingly a costume film, and it delved into an Americana that had become increasingly popular in American films in the late thirties–early forties and was particularly rife at Fox with Henry King's frequent excursions into a glamorously glorified American history and pseudo-history in *In Old Chicago*, *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (both 1938), *Jesse James* (1939), *Little Old New York*, *Maryland*, *Chad Hanna* (all 1940), and *Remember the Day* (1941).* Shortly before the New York premiere of *Heaven Can Wait* Lubitsch explained to an interviewer why he had chosen an American setting for his new film:

> After twenty years Ernst Lubitsch thought it was about time. He has been in this country more than two decades. Until he picked the story "Heaven Can Wait" he had never tackled a picture set in the United States. About Amercians, yes. About America, no. (*New York Sun*, August 2, 1943)

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* Mel Gussow has written the "characteristic Zanuck picture of that period [the late Thirties] was a romanticized look at American history; the building of a city, the founding of a religion, the finding of a musical sound, the making of a president, the invention of the telephone" (p. 70).

In telling the interviewer that he had never set a film in America before Lubitsch not only forgot *Three Women*, made nineteen years before, and the New York section of *Design for Living*, but also *That Uncertain Feeling*, which he had directed only two years before. Lubitsch's memory lapse is understandable, however, because in none of these films is the American setting of particular importance. *Heaven Can Wait*, as the interview indicated, was a different matter. The insistent Americanness of its setting naturally produced a change in Lubitsch's work, a change that may best be measured by determining what the film takes from earlier works and what it leaves out.

At first glance both *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown* might seem like throwbacks to earlier works in that both return Lubitsch to the upper-class milieu that was the rule in his films through 1938. Neither film, however, is a throwback in the sense that *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* and *That Uncertain Feeling* are because the latter pair of films made more of an attempt to recapture a past style rather than to reflect on it. *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown* might more accurately be called retrospective in that both films recall elements of earlier works to recast them in a new light. I do not wish to suggest by this that either film is dependent on earlier films for its meaning but, successful as they are in themselves, they both gain a resonance in meaning when placed in the company of the earlier films.

As a specific example of how the earlier films can affect our understanding of these late works, consider Lubitsch's use of "The Merry Widow" waltz to accompany the scene of Henry Van Cleve's death in *Heaven Can Wait*. The contradictory elements implied by the title of the tune as I have discussed them in a previous chapter are appropriate in *Heaven Can Wait* for a death scene that is in some ways as positive a movement for the character as it is a negation. Placed beside the earlier film, however, the later film reveals a further contrast: where the waltz was used as an undercutting of the love scenes in *The Merry Widow* by its suggestion of a kind of death that comes with the resolution of love conflicts, in *Heaven Can Wait* the waltz does the reverse, sweetening the death by endowing it with a lilting elegance of movement that is echoed by a gracefully languorous crane shot away from Henry's room across the foyer of his house. If death is the darker underside of the characters' passions in the earlier film, a force that the libido is always fleeing from only finally to embrace, in the later film it has taken on a more positive aspect which I will consider below.

The withdrawal of the author's voice that accompanied Lubitsch's movement toward a more naturalistic style finds its completion in these two films in differing yet related ways. In both films one individual's point of view is allowed to dominate the narrative in a way that never would have been possible in the earlier Lubitsch films with their strongly commenting authorial voice. This change is most apparent in *Heaven Can Wait* where much of the story is held together by the voice-over narration of the lead character, but it is also felt in *Cluny Brown* where Adam Belinski, by his disengaged attitude from much of the film's action, becomes the most reliable and forceful commentator on it for the audience. One can still distinguish an author's point of view in these works that differs from those of the characters, but it is not the most apparent one, not the one that initially seems to be shaping our responses to the narrative material.

The movement away from the individual to a larger social group finds its culmination in these two films with a new emphasis on the family as the basic unit of society and a key definer of character, a reflection of the family films that Charles Maland sees as flourishing in a burst of nostalgia through the late thirties–early forties. The explicit concern for family in both these films was foreshadowed by the surrogate families of *Design for Living* (the ménage à trois), *Ninotchka* (Ninotchka and her three comrades), *The Shop Around the Corner* (Mr. Matuschek and his employee-children), and *To Be Or Not To Be* (the entire acting troupe), but the important point is that the family has now become actual. The shift of focus from the couple as the basic social unit to the family brings with it a concomitant lessening of the most familiar dramatic conflicts of Lubitsch's earlier films.

The Oedipal conflicts that hovered over the earlier films as the leads battled against the dominant society were progressively transformed, as the father figures became more benign, with Mr. Matuschek and his alternate Pirovitch in *The Shop Around the Corner* and

Dobosh in *To Be Or Not To Be*, and finally resolved in *Heaven Can Wait* where the dominant male authority, Grandpa (Charles Coburn), becomes the lead character's greatest spiritual support. As there is a lessening of the Oedipal conflict, there is also a lessening of the triangle as the center of a Lubitsch drama. While the romantic comedy section of *To Be Or Not To Be* does form a triangle, the film itself suggests the triangular conflict may be neatly contained within the larger social group as Sobinski in his battle against the Nazis is perforce made a member of the acting company. With *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown* triangular conflicts become incidental to the dominant narrative line.

For all his concern with sex in the earlier films, Lubitsch in his wondrously restricted emphasis on the couple alone showed no concern for procreation. How much of an omission this is becomes clear in the context of the later works, as well as how important this omission is to the meaning of the earlier films. Any sense of procreation, any sense that the coupling of the two romantic leads could yield new life at the end of *The Merry Widow*, for example, would upset the delicate balance Lubitsch achieves between the opposing movements toward life and death that give the film its distinctive comic tone.

Because both *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown* become more concerned with family, they also become concerned with a continuation of life beyond the couple, but a life in which the couple by blood ties nonetheless continues to participate. Where the social groups in *Ninotchka*, *The Shop Around the Corner*, and *To Be Or Not To Be* extended the individual beyond himself in the present moment, the concern for family in *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown* serves to extend the individual beyond himself in time. This new sense of a positive value to the passage of time marks an important shift for an artist who could see the culmination of a love affair as a kind of death, for an artist whose characters at their most impulsive seemed engaged in a mad flight from the web of time. The expansiveness of time is most apparent in *Heaven Can Wait*, where the family is presented through *four* generations, enough to create the suggestion of a stretching backward and forward in time indefinitely. For Lubitsch the most salient characteristic of the family as an institution is its temporal quality as its existence *through* eternity endows each transient life with a sense of permanence, making of every finite life an infinity.

The centrality of family in these last two films marks another development that I had first noted with *The Shop Around the Corner*, where an individual's sense of self was very much defined by the social order to which the individual belonged. Where Lubitsch's films of the early thirties showed characters in some way oppressed or troubled by their position in society of actively rebelling against it, the later films reveal an impulse toward belonging that at first might be seen as conformist although, as I have argued with *The Shop Around the Corner*, this issue is somewhat more complicated. With *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown* a sense of *home* becomes central to the characters' lives, a positive force that has none of the ambiguities attached to the shop in the earlier film: in *Heaven Can Wait* home is almost taken for granted, while in *Cluny Brown* home is actively sought after by characters who are permanently homeless.

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Lubitsch's move to Twentieth-Century Fox brought with it the most noticeable change in the look of his films, a difference that was in large part due to set design. Perhaps because of all the costume dramas, set design at Fox in the late thirties and forties had a solidity and a sense of volume that was the opposite of the curvilinear airiness of Paramount in the thirties. Fox sets were ceilinged well before critics began noticing ceilings with *Citizen Kane* in 1941, and they were patterned on receding lines in complement to the ceilings to emphasize a boxlike sense of depth. Lubitsch's one departure from Paramount in the early thirties with *The Merry Widow* at M-G-M produced a film that for all the lavish furnishings and sumptuous detail typical of Metro still looked more like other Paramount films of the period than like any M-G-M film. Nevertheless, set design at Fox when Lubitsch began working there was fortuitously congruent with a change in his style that I indicated with *Angel* when he began breaking up the once vast and empty spaces of the earlier films to create more of a lived-in quality.

Another aspect of the look of these films that grows out of set design needs to be mentioned here, both for what Lubitsch takes from it and for what he ignores. In the sense of an entirely closed space created by the ceilings and converging lines, the Fox sets themselves encouraged a staging in depth which Andre Bazin saw as the sign of a true "deep focus" style of photography. Bazin dates the beginning of this style in American films with William Wyler and Orson Welles, but I think it is more accurate to credit the style to a studio and see it beginning at Fox in the late thirties, especially in the films of Henry King and John Ford. I have already noted Lubitsch moving toward a kind of staging in depth in *The Shop Around the Corner*, where characters in the background of a shot do have some dramatic relationship to those in the foreground, although the soft-focus background makes the hierarchy of dramatic interest in the shot clear enough. As Lubitsch's vision expanded beyond the individual, it was natural that his camera should show a greater interest in life outside the dramatically central character of a scene, but that expanded interest is about as far as his staging-in-depth goes.

Lubitsch is not really interested in establishing the possibility of different playing areas that fascinated directors like Ford, Welles, and Jean Renoir. By the time of his two Fox films, his photographic style pretty much conformed to the dominant deep-focus style of the period, but the actual mise-en-scène is fairly close to that of the shallow-focus style in *The Shop Around the Corner*. That is, background information or detail can have some bearing on the foreground drama, like, for example, the full-length portrait of Grandpa over the fireplace during the 25th Wedding Anniversary scene of *Heaven Can Wait*, presented in a typically unaccented style to suggest a benign spiritual presence in the characters' lives that they themselves are not consciously aware of. But the background does not contain items or events that in any way compete with the foreground action which, as always, remains dominant for Lubitsch. Even as changes in Lubitsch's vision made it easy for him to adapt to the deep-focus style

of the period, his shots continue to suggest a definite hierarchy of dramatic interest that reflects in turn his hierarchical sense of society.

The empty spaces typical of the earlier films do reappear in *Heaven Can Wait* in the scenes in the foyer of Hell that provide the framework for the rest of the story: this is a kind of art deco Hell with a great open space and sweeping diagonals, although the typical white-on-white has given way, as the nature of the place demands, to more of a red-on-red with glints of pale gold and heavy columns serving somewhat to break up the sweeping lines. The imposing quality of this cavernous set complements the imposing nature of the place being introduced, but the set gains an additional expressiveness in retrospect when the inevitable contrast with the settings of the rest of the film takes place, and the relative openness of Hell is set against the more enclosed and hence more secure spaces of the Van Cleve mansion.

It might not be apparent at first because of the large number of rooms that comprise the Van Cleve mansion, but the setting in *Heaven Can Wait* is almost as restricted as that of *The Shop Around the Corner*, providing as much of a definition of the characters' lives as the shop in the earlier film. As the film proceeds, it becomes clear that the vastness of space in Hell offers a definition of damnation, a state of being removed from all social and personal connections that enmesh the characters in something beyond their personal interests. In other words, damnation as *Heaven Can Wait* presents it comes close to being a state that characters in the earlier films had actively sought. As Henry's life moves closer and closer to death, there is a tragic undercurrent in the film that flows from his increasing isolation. Precisely how the set reflects this undercurrent may be seen in the film's color scheme.

As Lubitsch's first film in color, *Heaven Can Wait* was highly praised for its use of color, but in such generalized terms that it is difficult to determine exactly what is good about it.* Color did extend the range of Lubitsch's palette, but he remained pretty much within the conventions of the period in how he applied it. I am tempted to pick up on Bazin's notion that color was an inevitable development in a medium that was always trying to make itself more realistic and see this as evidence of Lubitsch's increasing naturalism, but in some ways the reverse is true for color in the thirties and forties. At the time color operated pretty much as a function of genre, with the most fanciful genres like musicals, historical romances, and certain kinds of westerns demanding color. A more "realistic" period film of the time like Henry King's *The Song of Bernadette* (1943) was made in black-and-white to emphasize its realism, even though the story features a miraculous occurrence. Underlying this color prejudice was the aesthetic conviction that monochromatic black-and-white was appropriate for realistic subjects because reality itself is grayish, dull, colorless. Inversely, the *de rigueur* application of color to historical romances suggests the nostalgic view that the past was somehow more colorful than the present.*

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* Typical of the response was James Agee's remark that the color "was used with sensitiveness and wit, I thought, for the first time" (*The Nation*, September 4, 1943).

On the one hand *Heaven Can Wait* seems to play to this conventional nostalgia associated with color by a progressive draining of color as the film progresses up to the present day of its audience: bright reds and deep blues, both fairly saturated and vibrant in their contrast of hot and cold tones, yielding to ivories and finally pale whites. But if there is any nostalgia to be read into this color scheme, there is plenty of contradictory material in the narrative to undercut the nostalgia: past mores, specifically regarding love and courtship, are treated satirically throughout; the most riotously colorful set, the Strable household, is the occasion of the film's most ludicrously farcical scene, with the Strables doing heavy-duty work as the film's most thoroughly foolish characters; and there is nothing at all nostalgic in the tone of Henry's narration as he recalls these past events.

The progressive draining of color may be explained in realistic terms: that is, the color provides an accurate reflection of changes in

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* The distinction may be seen most clearly in two of Zanuck's personal productions. Where *Wilson* (1944) in its screenplay presented itself as history on a grand scale, the fact that it was in color signaled romance, however much the narrative tried to stick to facts. On the other hand, Zanuck's decision to shoot *The Longest Day* (1962) in black-and-white, fairly unusual for a multi-million dollar epic in the sixties, defined a more matter-of-fact, quasi-documentary approach.

fashion through the period covered by the film, moving from the overstuffed look of the late nineteenth century to the streamlined look of the twenties and thirties. This is not to say that the color has no expressive value, but that the overtness of expression, as with other elements of style in Lubitsch's later films, has been submerged within a more naturalistic presentation. Because the set remains pretty much the same through the course of the film, it is through color as revealed in the constantly changing furnishings that changes in *fashion* are recorded. For example, the bright colors and fussily overdecorated quality of the Strable house, by recalling the style of the Van Cleve mansion ten years before, clearly marks the Strables as provincial, but in retrospect it might also call the conventionalized taste of the Van Cleves into question. Furthermore, much as the bright colors mark and mock the Strables, by their recollection of the earlier setting and an earlier vitality they provide an appropriate context for the renewal of Henry's and Martha's marriage. In the sense of mutual reflection granted the setting, that it both expresses its period and reflects on the emotions of the characters, there emerges the suggestion of character as a function of period.

Color may be seen to be expressive of character in *Heaven Can Wait*, but it is expressive both as a *reflection* of character and as a *determinant* of character. The presentation of the color changes provides the key to how we register the expressivity of color in the film. Of course the changes in furnishings and color must be the work of human intervention, but the elliptical structure of the film's narrative never permits us to see the characters effecting the changes. While we might note the changes, the characters in the film never remark on them so that every change seems to happen mysteriously, as if of its own accord. Because change is accepted as something familiar by the characters, change in fashion, which is the film's chief means of signaling the passage of time, finally seems to exist apart from the characters much as it is also a product of their creation.

How this reciprocal action between character and setting works may be most clearly seen in the sequence of Henry's Sixtieth Birthday. Henry's son Jack is lecturing Henry in a somewhat paternal fashion for spending so little time at home since his wife Martha's death.

Henry says he would stay at home if he could hire someone to read to him, but Jack soon sees through this desire as a front for Henry to get himself a young playmate. Henry, pushing his case to gain a little culture, protests that there are so many books in the library he has not read but would like to. To demonstrate, he pulls a book off a shelf at random: "How to Make Your Husband Happy," the book that had first brought Henry and Martha together. The scene between Henry and Jack takes place in the library, which was also the location for the scene in which Henry convinced Martha to elope with him, but the look of the library is different in the two scenes following the general color scheme of the film: where the earlier scene was dominated by reds, the later scene has mostly white backgrounds. However, at the moment that Henry pulls out the book, he sits, stunned by the memory the book *forces* on him, in a deep red chair, the one splash of red in the entire image. The red chair functions much like the book, which itself might be seen as an element of the set: they both serve to encase a character who is persistently oriented toward the present-tense within a framework of memory.

As the color and furnishings seem to take on a life of their own in the course of the film, they endow the world of these characters with a magical quality, a child's view of the world that gives life to inanimate objects. Just as a child can view changes in his universe as miraculously self-generating because he does not have the knowledge or experience to know how they come about, change is presented in this film as self-generating because it is a view that belongs to the narrator, Henry himself. Our first glimpse of Henry in the flashback is as a baby, and in a sense he remains a child through the rest of the film. In the insistent equation of the lead character with children, *Heaven Can Wait* specifically recalls *Design for Living,* but with a number of important differences.

Unlike the three main characters in *Design for Living,* Henry is literally presented as a child (played by Dickie Moore in this episode) in that we first see him in the context of his family. But also in regard to the family, Henry will always remain a child as the following exchange with the French maid (Signe Hasso) indicates:

HENRY: You're not going to work here—I'll see to that.
MADEMOISELLE: What's the matter? Did I make little boy angry?
HENRY: Now see here—that's the last time anybody's going to call me little boy.
MADEMOISELLE: Oh, sorry if I hurt feelings. But Maman—
HENRY: Yes, ma-ma. That's the trouble: ma-ma and pa-pa and grandpa-pa and grandma-ma . . . it's a conspiracy to keep me in short pants. They think they own me, body and soul.
MADEMOISELLE: Oh, my understanding for young man is perfect: your soul is bigger zan your pants. Zis is great tragedy, great tragedy.

It is Henry's *position* in the family that defines him as a child, not his age. He might associate growing up with rebellion from the family, but he never does in fact leave it. Mademoiselle sets the tone here for the treatment of Henry's desires that will be repeated by a fair number of other characters throughout the film with her ironic deflection and neat sexual innuendo: the romantic soul that is bigger than Henry's pants will continue to be associated with his childlike desires.

Henry's innocence is much like that which defines the childlike innocence of Gilda, Tom, and George in *Design for Living* in that innocence in both films sets itself against the "real" world of business and "responsible" living. The equation with children in *Design for Living* establishes the characters' out-of-place standing with the rest of society. If they are like children, then they are orphans, but, importantly, orphans of their own design. We might see them as children, but we never see them in the context of a family other than the metaphorical, and unstable, one they form for themselves. If rebellion signifies growing up for Henry, for Tom, Gilda, and George the childlike qualities are part of their rebellion against their society: it is their refusal to "grow up" and accept the responsibilities of an adult world as defined by their society that sets them apart.

The child simile in *Heaven Can Wait* works in an almost opposite direction: it creates a firm sense of belonging for Henry, making him inextricably part of something larger than himself that will always serve to define who he is. Henry is naturally a child to his parents and his grandparents, but in the later sections of the film both his wife and son treat him like a child as well. It is not a designation he actively seeks, as the characters in *Design for Living* might, and at times he appears foolish because of it, but it does nonetheless define an indelible part of his character. In *Design for Living* the childlike characters define themselves by opposition to society, in *Heaven Can Wait* by place in society.

That Henry in his innocence appears at all foolish is in line with a development I have noted with the fool-heroes in the later films. Gilda, Tom, and George in *Design for Living* might sustain illusions about themselves, particularly about being able to suppress sex, but they do so with a knowingness, playing at life with a full awareness of the rules of the game, so they can never appear foolish to the rest of society. Where a good deal of the comedy in *Design for Living* derives from the challenge their bohemian values make to the rest of the world in the person of Max, much of the comedy in *Heaven Can Wait* centers on the challenge the rest of the world makes to Henry's innocent values. When Henry is trying to describe his new love to his mother (Spring Byington), she unintentionally renders all his remarks ridiculous by taking them realistically:

HENRY: You remember that story about the young man, I think he was a shepherd, who was walking in the woods?
BERTHA: Oh, you've been in the country?
HENRY: No, it happened right on Broadway. Suddenly the young man saw a big castle, and out of the window leaned the most beautiful princess. Nothing could stop him. He climbed up the parapet of the castle—
BERTHA: Henry! Henry! Have you broken into the Waldorf again?
HENRY: Mother, darling, let's forget the fairy tale.
BERTHA: Well, it's about time you grew up.

The comedy here has a charmingly accidental quality: it doesn't spring from any awareness on Bertha's part, but rather spills from the crash of two different kinds of innocence, one moonily romantic, the other naively literal-minded.

Because of Henry's innocence, characters more aware than Bertha, like Grandpa (Charles Coburn), Martha (Gene Tierney), Henry's own son Jack (Michael Ames) and, most embarrassingly for Henry, Jack's gold-digging girlfriend Peggy Nash (Helene Reynolds), can all be fairly

ironic in their dealings with him. Henry who had always believed it was the ardor of his romantic passion, carefully deployed, that had swept Martha off her feet, receives this startling revelation on his 25th Wedding Anniversary:

MARTHA: To tell you the truth, I'm being a little sentimental, and so I came in here [the library] for a few minutes.
HENRY: Yes, this is where it all started.
MARTHA: Twenty-five years ago.
HENRY: I was standing there by the window.
MARTHA: No, you were sitting in the chair.
HENRY: That's right. And then you came in. *You* went to the window—
MARTHA: Then suddenly you started walking toward me—very slowly, very slowly. I could count every step.
HENRY: Oh, you were such a frightened little girl! And the closer I came, the more frightened you were.
MARTHA: Darling, I want to make a confession. After all, we've been married twenty-five years.
HENRY: What is it, Martha?
MARTHA: I wasn't frightened at all.
HENRY: You weren't?
MARTHA: Not at all. And when you were walking toward me so very slowly, do you know what was in my mind? I thought: What's the matter with him? Can't he walk faster?

As Martha has a more precise memory of the physical details of this scene, she also has a more practical grasp of the real world and a clearer insight into the actual nature of their romantic moment. If Henry is a fool as Ninotchka and Tura were fools, the subject of his foolishness is not only new for Lubitsch but something of an about-face: it is in his romantic longings that Henry repeatedly appears the most foolish. The romantic leads in *The Shop Around the Corner* could also appear foolish in their secret longings, but these were desires having more to do with class aspirations than romance. Furthermore, a dark undertow pulled at their foolishness with a tragic potential in their conflicting desires. Henry's foolishness is a benign attribute, made secure by his economic power and an all-indulging family that enables him to achieve anything he desires.

There is a two-sided quality to Henry's foolishness in that desires which make him appear ridiculous in the context of the "real" world also endow him with a quiet elegance and poetic expressiveness denied the other characters. Here, for example, is Henry on why he misrepresented himself as a book salesman to Martha on their first meeting:

> "I'm not employed here, and I'm not a book salesman. I took one look at you and I followed you into this store. If you had walked into a restaurant, I would have become a waiter. If you had walked into a burning building, I would have become a fireman. If you had walked into an elevator, I would have stopped it between two floors and we would have stayed there for the rest of our lives."

The language is simple and direct, but in the repetition of phrase patterns this little speech achieves a sense of rhythm that suggests the lines might be scanned. There is a deft musical quality in the elegantly elongated "I would have" phrase the third time it is started, the wonderful slowing down of tempo suggesting a sudden and, in this playful context, unexpected deepening of feeling. This speech comes shortly after the above-quoted scene in which Henry's mother takes all his figurative speech literally. The dramatic effect of the achieved contrast is to deflect the potential foolishness of this later speech by showing beforehand how much Henry's high-flown romanticism clashes with the world around him. As foolish as Henry is, then, there is also something irreducibly grand in his foolishness.

But why make Henry foolish at all? Lubitsch's characters in the past never warranted such qualification of their romantic longings. And Henry is at times very close in his language to earlier characters. In the scene with his mother, Henry provides a description of love that strikingly recalls a description offered by Gilda in *Design for Living:*

> HENRY: Mother, when you saw Father for the first time, did you feel that unmistakable something? Did you feel an electric spark from your head to your toes that swept over you like a hurricane and lifted you off the ground but you bounced up again and floated over the tree-tops?
>
> BERTHA: Spark! Hurricane! Heaven forbid, I never had such a feeling. Oh, Henry, where do you get it from? Not from me. And your father certainly never had any spark!

Compare this with Gilda's attempt to explain to Max what she felt after a visit from George:

> GILDA: Have you ever felt your brain catch fire and a curious, dreadful thing go right through your body down, down to your very toes, and leave your ears ringing?
>
> MAX: That's abnormal.
>
> GILDA: Well, that's how I felt just before you came in.
>
> MAX: Yes, how did you feel yesterday after you promenaded with Tom?
>
> GILDA: The opposite. It started in my toes and came up, up, up, very slowly till my brain caught fire. But the ringing in the ears was the same.

In the play of a romantic sensibility against a dully prosaic one the comic conflict of the two scenes is identical. And in both scenes the prosaic character is ridiculed for not being able to enter into the imaginings of the romantic one. But Henry still appears somewhat foolish in his scene as Gilda does not in hers, and for a reason that is indicative of the change in Lubitsch's attitude toward his characters.

Gilda's description of her feelings to Max is not spoken from any real attempt to make Max understand her. In fact, it is clear from her aggressive physicality as she delightedly sweeps her hands across her body to complement her description that she is challenging Max, attacking his conventionalized attitudes through a poetic heightening of her own. Henry, on the other hand, really does want his mother to understand what he is feeling, and in this impossible attempt to communicate with her he begins to look silly. Henry makes the attempt because he defines himself in part through his mother: the romanticism is what he learned from her as a child, and as he continues to be her child he must convey the romanticism back to her. Gilda is an elitist: she sees her value as superior to those of the dominant society and says so with a confident assertiveness. Henry, while set apart from society by his attitude, continues unconsciously to see himself a part of it.

Throughout this book I have claimed an expanding social and political vision in Lubitsch's films. As this change is most apparent with the overtly political material of *Ninotchka* and *To Be Or Not To Be*, *Heaven Can Wait* might initially seem a sharp reversal, for it is a film which manages to span seventy years moving through the Spanish-American War, the First World War, the stock market crash, the Depression, and the Second World War without one reference, not even an oblique one, to any of these catastrophic events. Lubitsch himself suggested a reversal here in his delighted defense of the film's apparent meaninglessness:

> I encountered partly great resistance before I made this picture because *it had no message and made no point whatsoever*. The hero was a man only interested in good living with *no aim of accomplishing anything noble*. Being asked by the studio why I wanted to make *such a pointless picture*, I answered that I hoped to introduce to a motion picture audience a number of people, and if the audience should find them likable—that would be sufficient for its success. (quoted in Weinberg, p. 267, emphasis mine)

Lubitsch is being true to a remark I quoted in an earlier chapter to the effect that if a leading character in a contemporary movie did not work for a living, that lack would become the significant feature of his character, which is very much the case with Henry in this film. Lubitsch had also claimed that this film is specifically about America, and for the business-dominated America in which this film is set, the actions and the characters of the film must appear as worthless. Lubitsch's comments might best be understood by looking at the film in the context of two of the most popular genres of the period, the biographical drama and the family saga.

"Bio-pics," as *Variety* has dubbed the genre, became popular in the mid-thirties with a series of films at Warner Brothers and Fox that generally dealt with foreign figures whose true genius came in conflict with the narrow restrictions of their society. Through the turn of the decade the genre became thoroughly nativized by films on Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Father Flanagan of Boys Town, Dr. William Morton of painless dentistry, Alexander Graham Bell, Gentleman Jim Corbett, Alvin York, a whitewashed Jesse James and, in the fictionalized form of Charles Foster Kane, William Randolph Hearst.* Two of the top commercial hits of 1942, insistently American as their titles indicate, were *Pride of the Yankees*, about Lou Gehrig, and *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, about George M. Cohan, both bio-pics that seem to have had a direct influence on *Heaven Can Wait* the following year.

There is one strong echo of the Gehrig biography in *Heaven Can Wait* in the scene when Martha inadvertently reveals to Henry that she has been seeing a doctor, but then minimizes the importance of her illness, which is in fact fatal. In *Pride of the Yankees* Gehrig (Gary Cooper) similarly will not reveal the seriousness of his illness to his wife (Teresa Wright), yet she immediately recognizes it and will in turn not reveal her recognition to her husband. With an unawareness typical of the character, Henry in *Heaven Can Wait* simply accepts Martha's story. The differing views of marriage in the two films then suggest an idealizing romanticism of perfect harmonies in *Pride of the Yankees* in contrast to a complex set of imbalances and insensitivities in *Heaven Can Wait* which Lubitsch sees as lying at the foundation of even a happy marriage.

More than this specific reference, *Heaven Can Wait* shares a couple of dramatic strategies with these two films. There is a genre peculiarity in both *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and *Pride of the Yankees* in that success came fairly early and fairly easily to both George M. Cohan and Lou Gehrig respectively, so that their lives were led with a minimal of dramatic conflict, the only real drama in Gehrig's life emerging with a death that came too early. *Yankee Doodle Dandy* tries to gives its undramatic drama a sense of forward movement with a framing device in which George M. (James Cagney) visits President Roosevelt. There is some darkening suggestion in this framing scene, which comes to naught, that Cohan might have been summoned for a reprimand from the President, whom the film treats as nearly a god if not God himself. The scenes in Hell in *Heaven Can Wait* echo this audience with God in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* right down to the threatened punishment that is never realized because Henry is simply too insignificant. When the Devil (Laird Cregar) at the beginning of the film asks Henry to name "an outstanding crime" he may have committed, Henry can only reply, "I'm afraid I can't think of any, but I can safely say my whole life has been one continuous misdemeanor." The frame in *Heaven Can Wait* serves as in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* to give dramatic shape to a life that is essentially undramatic.

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* The films are, respectively: *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) and *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940), *Young Tom Edison* and *Edison the Man* (both 1940), *Boys Town* (1938), *The Great Moment* (1944), *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell* (1939), *Gentleman Jim* (1942), *Sergeant York* (1941), *Jesse James* (1939) and *The Return of Frank James* (1940) and *Citizen Kane* (1941).

The influence of *Pride of the Yankees* is even more important to the extent that the film focuses on the everyday aspects of Gehrig's life in the absence of any real drama outside the one event which comes at the end of his life and, necessarily, at the end of the film as well: choosing a job, courtship, marriage, decorating a house, mother-in-law problems. In a manner not all that different from Lubitsch's historical dramas, events of a private and personal nature which the average member of the audience has probably lived through are given a heightened importance solely because the character is an important public figure. In both *Pride of the Yankees* and *Yankee Doodle Dandy* commonplace events are made interesting *solely* because of the people who perform them. *Heaven Can Wait* takes the form of these two bio-pics but goes against the conventions of the genre by applying them to a character of no significance. By this idiosyncratic inversion of the genre, Lubitsch strips everyday events of the pretensions bio-pics artificially place on them in order that he may make events of little dramatic consequence dramatically significant *in themselves.*

Not uncommonly, bio-pic in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* intersects with family saga, a commingling of genres that obtains in *Heaven Can Wait* as well, with the common meeting ground for both in a feeling of historicity. But as *Heaven Can Wait* undercuts the bio-pic by making the hero unimportant, it also plays against the family saga by not making any direct connections between the aging of the family and the course of history. There is a deliberate and apparent narrowing of focus in this film to the extent that the narrative is restricted to Henry's narrow viewpoint and only rarely does the actual drama stray outside the confines of the Van Cleve mansion into the "real world." I have already suggested in my discussion of set design that this narrowing is more apparent than real because the settings themselves are always invoking the outside world by their changes in fashion. Furthermore, for this period with the war raging in Europe, a narrow focus on the American family could itself have a pointed political significance, as the militaristic introductory title to *Since You Went Away* (1944), David O. Selznick's massive wartime tribute to the women left behind, makes clear: "This is the story of the Unconquerable Fortress . . . the American home, 1943."

In its consciously stereotyping attempt to present the average middle-class home as the bulwark of American society, *Since You Went Away* is useful here as a means of defining common assumptions which America had about its own families in order to show how much Lubitsch operates within these assumptions and how much he departs from them. Early in the film, Claudette Colbert decides to rent out a bedroom in her large house and bring in a little extra cash needed because her husband has gone off to war. The first caller, a dark-haired, dark-eyed soldier with square jaw and fleshy features, catches a glimpse of Colbert's two daughters, Jennifer Jones and Shirley Temple, and seems more interested in them than the room. The very proper Colbert tells him the room is already taken and practically slams the door in his face. As the man's looks suggest immigrant stock, there is something of a class-conflict in Colbert's rejection of him. Specifically, her defense of middle-class propriety is presented in sexual terms because if the American home is like a fortress, as the introductory title avers, then its prime defense is against the loose sexual mores the middle class always suspects the lower classes, and especially immigrant lower classes, of having. The orderly world of marriage and children must be preserved in their pristine purity.

Now, of course, it takes some sex to go from chaste and proper marriage to children, but it is clear in *Since You Went Away* that the class-determined sexuality represented by the soldier—raw, overt, a pursuit in its own right—has no place in a respectable middle-class American home where a feminized view of romantic love must reign supreme. This house belongs to the women who inhabit it, and any man to enter this bastion of propriety must yield to the values of its rulers. All the leading men in the film seem eager to do so: a grandfatherly asexual Monty Woolley who finally does rent the room; the dreamily romantic, calf-eyed male ingenue of Robert Walker who becomes Jones' fiancé; and the one-time suitor of Colbert, Joseph Cotten, who, if he ever had any trace of sexual passion in the past, seems to have lost even the memory of it. The home in *Heaven Can*

Wait is equally feminized, and this is an important quality for understanding Henry's character. As he tells the Devil at the beginning of his narration, "Perhaps the best way to tell you the story of my life is to tell you about the women in my life." But unlike *Since You Went Away* this feminine world of the home is constantly being played off against a business world that belongs exclusively to the men of the film to create a rigid separation of the sexes which only Henry manages to escape.

Although *Heaven Can Wait* returned Lubitsch to the upper-class milieu of the earlier films, the milieu here has quite a different impact because the question of how wealth and position were achieved have become important issues in this film. In the musicals rank was inherited, while the earlier comedies established the notion of an inborn aristocratic sensibility. In neither case was upper-classness chiefly a matter of money as it is in the American world of *Heaven Can Wait*. Beneath the apparent opposition of provincialism and urbanity of the Strables and Van Cleves there is suggested a similarity of an insecure class sensibility that defines itself through proper display. The Van Cleve library is full of books, not one of which Henry, and possibly anyone else in the Van Cleve household, has read. Their taste in clothing and furnishings is so thoroughly conventionalized as to follow the dominant fashions representative of each period so that, for all their wealth, these characters are finally seen more as reflections of an average in their society than a superior value. Twenty-six-year-old Henry might resent his mother's inquiries about the family background of the woman he has fallen in love with, but twenty-five years later he will be making the same inquiries of his son's latest girlfriend. The characters in this film in no way set themselves apart from the dominant values of their society as the aristocrats of the earlier films could do. Rather, they have fully internalized them.

The progenitor both of the family's wealth and its members, and the film's only true ironist, Grandpa is a key figure for understanding the film's view of this family. His character is a neat amalgam of familiar types from the period, with a number of twists that give him his own distinctive quality. Like the Eugene Pallette characters in *My Man Godfrey*, *Tovarich* (1937), and *The Lady Eve* (1941), he is the man who through his own industry has brought his family to its present upper-class position. Yet, by giving the family a station different from his, he has in effect made himself a stranger with his own family. The outsiderness in the other films is generally defined by a blustery masculinity that is uncomfortable in the feminized world of the culturally aspiring women. But Grandpa in *Heaven Can Wait* is not entirely a stranger to this feminized world because he has an appreciation for the romanticized side of Henry's nature which few other characters see. Like the grandfatherly Monty Woolley in *Since You Went Away*, Grandpa, having retired and therefore a captive of the feminine world of the home, is a caustic observer of it. Yet where Woolley is typically sentimentalized to show that warm feeling and sympathy for the women underlie the caustic surface, Grandpa's ironies on the family's behavior continue throughout the film to mark his distance from it much as he also can at times appreciate its values.

Grandpa as an original Captain of Industry occupies an honored place in American culture that marks him as superior to his descendants, much as the dead Grandfather in *Holiday* (1938) is revered by his rebellious granddaughter Katharine Hepburn who thinks her stodgy and conventional father has betrayed the spirit and invention demanded of the founder-grandfather. This notion of decadence in future generations is familiar enough in popular American culture where the tycoon, by his vital nature which enabled him to produce the wealth, must be superior to those who enjoy the wealth and are made soft by it; the Captain of Industry always has a richer life in spirit than those who are rich in funds. *Heaven Can Wait* draws on this cliché to invert it: a large part of Grandpa's irony, generally a sign of powerlessness in later Lubitsch, derives from his sense of loss, a clear understanding of what he had sacrificed to become the Captain of Industry he was. In a sense, his character as well as his future belongs to his two grandchildren, Henry and his goody-goody, hardworking cousin Albert: Henry is the man he wanted to be, but Albert is the man he became. *Heaven Can Wait* might have contributed to the Americana that Alfred Kazin among others sees as so strong in this period, but it presented an idiosyncratic vision of America in that it viewed a period that prized the aggressive masculine achievements of the Captains of Industry ~~from a distinctly~~ feminized viewpoint.[*]

The rigid separation of male and female spheres of activity in American culture that the film presents necessarily provides a framework for the actions of the male leads different from that of the earlier films with their European settings. The extent to which business is the world to which the men have devoted themselves, and not love as in the earlier films, is brought out in sharp relief by a neat reversal of our expectations when Henry's son seems to undergo an abrupt character change in the interval between two episodes.[†] From the first time we see Jack as a boy, we are set up to expect another Henry: as Henry says of him, "Where does he get it from?" he uses a line from earlier in the film that frequently had been applied to himself. The expectation that his behavior comes from Henry seems confirmed by the Peggy Nash episode in which Jack, like young Henry before him, has taken up with a show girl, much to his parents' dismay. But the sixtieth birthday episode, which is the next time we see Jack, begins with him having breakfast in the familiar dining room of the Van Cleve mansion with his secretary as he begins his day of business. While we last saw Jack enthralled with show girls, he has in the meantime married conventionally. His wife remains a noncharacter for the film: we catch a brief glimpse of her, enough to see that he has married within his class as Henry and Martha had hoped, but that is all. The secretary is not much more of a character than the wife, but she is given more screen time and more to say, and she even seems to be taking over the role of a wife as she and not the wife has joined Jack at the breakfast table. The mansion which had

previously belonged to the women is now giving way to the male world of business, and the women themselves, as the Peggy Nash episode had already suggested, are becoming more businesslike.

The business world necessarily remains on the periphery of the film because the narrative is unfolding from Henry's point of view; it is never fully established, for example, what the family business actually is because the only direct reference to it is a remark by Henry's father about the "Van Cleve Importing Company." Nevertheless, *Heaven Can Wait* sets itself apart from the earlier comedies by the degree to which the business world has infiltrated the upper class milieu, and not in the way of simple opposition as in *Design for Living* or something to be brilliantly manipulated as in *Trouble in Paradise*. Rather, the business world envelops the narrative much as incidental scenes without Henry almost always precede those in which he is featured. Although denied specific historical events, we are given enough sense of an outside world to see how it is developing in this period and how characters are developing in relation to it.

It is in fact fairly easy to see three of the four generations of Van Cleve males—Henry, as always, the exception—as allegorical representatives of capitalistic growth. Grandpa is the early stage of capitalism: exploiting and pioneering, he creates a thriving enterprise from apparently very little. Randolph, Henry's father, is the conservative businessman at the turn of the century who maintains a slow but steady growth, putting the business on a fiscal basis sound enough to weather the Depression without causing the Van Cleves any apparent financial worry. Finally, Jack, whom we see working in the business during the booming war years, is the twentieth-century expansionist, the man who most clearly recalls the founder, but become so thoroughly consumed by business that his home life has become an extension of his business life. For all the apparent narrowness of the film's focus, then, there is a clear suggestion of historical process, a change in the times that is directly affecting the behavior of individual characters.

As Henry is the one character who does not fit into this scheme, he is nonetheless as much a creature of history as his ancestors and descendants because he occupies a privileged position as a child of the Gilded Age. Coming in the breathing space between nineteenth-century Exploitation and twentieth-century Expansionism, he is freed from the pressures of the outside world at the same time that he is a creation of that world. *Heaven Can Wait* posits a markedly different sense of freedom from that of the earlier films. Where Lubitsch's characters in the past generally sought for a freedom that could only be found by opposing the restrictions of their society, Henry finds a spiritual freedom by being so completely a part of something larger than himself that he cannot see it. It is in his unawareness of this larger world that Henry is so foolish and nearly the opposite of his grandfather, whose ironies mark him as the most clear-sighted character in the film, the most aware of the limitations placed on their lives. Yet it is also this innocence of the world beyond himself that is a sign of Henry's grace.

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[*] Kazin has written of this period: "Never before did a nation seem so hungry for news of itself, and not since those early years of the nineteenth century when America had been the world's eighth wonder to European observers did America . . . seem so magnetic a subject in itself to so many different minds. . . . Obviously, of course, much of this writing represented the reflex patriotism and hungry traditionalism of a culture fighting for its life as it moved into war. Obviously, too, Hitler made nationalists out of many American writers" (pp. 486–87). See also William Stott, chs. 12–13.

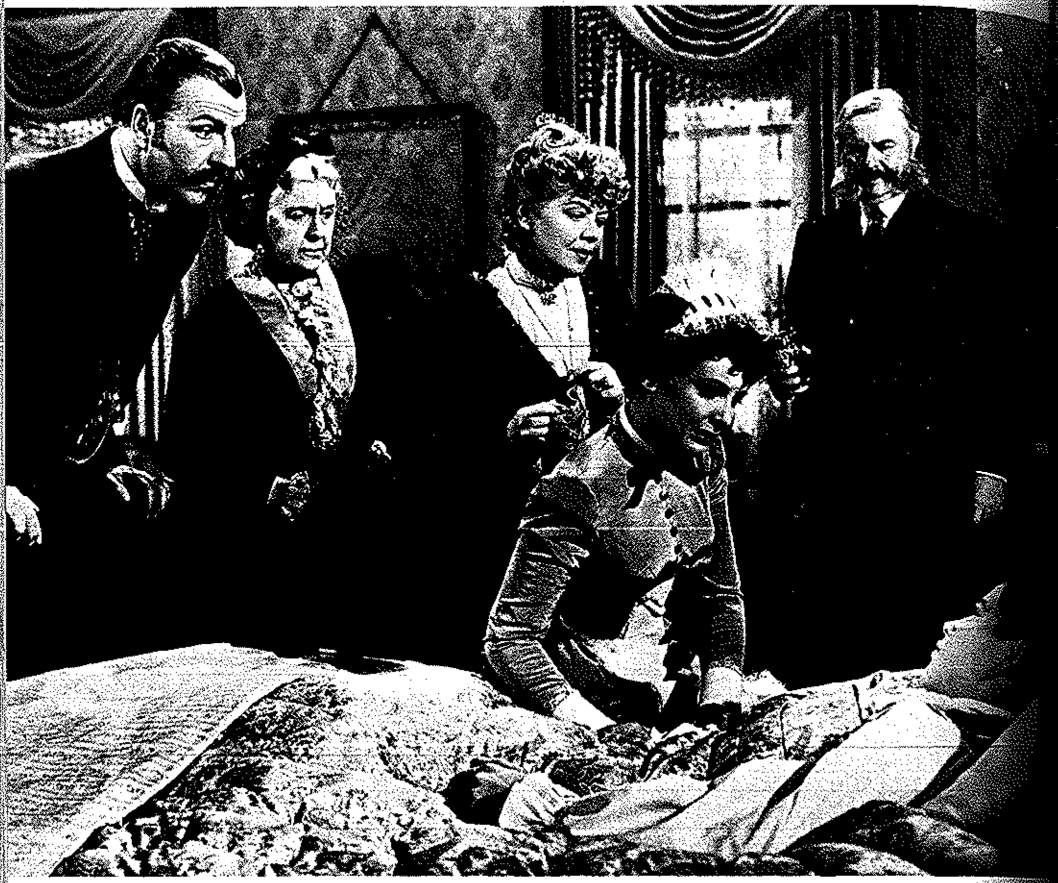
[†] Molly Haskell has noted a peculiar feature of American films that Lubitsch is playing against here: "That love is woman's stuff is a hoary Anglo-Saxon idea, devolving from the (American) tough guy and (British) public school etiquette that to show emotion is bad form, a sign of effeminacy, and that being tender in love is the equivalent of doing the dishes or darning socks" (p. 157).

The bare outline of the narrative might seem to support Lubitsch's claim for the slightness of *Heaven Can Wait*. On the one hand, the story is simplicity itself: a man is born, grows up, marries, and dies. There is the suggestion of a *Bildungsroman* in that Henry in the early episodes seems to be learning valuable lessons about life: as a young boy he learns to gain the favor of a girl by giving her two beetles and as a young man he learns from the French maid the new sexual mores of his time. But the suggestion of a *Bildungsroman* almost seems raised in order to be denied because Henry never really learns anything after the opening episodes: his development is arrested in adolescence. Ever after he finishes his life story, it is the Devil who must draw the conclusions about his life and advise him to try Heaven. As if to complement Henry's arrested development, the film plays against every dramatic expectation it sets up: any issue which might complicate the simple narrative scheme is resolved *within* the episode which introduced it. There is no carry-over from episode to episode that might give a definite dramatic shape to the character's life and make it seem more meaningful.

For all the simplicity of the narrative, however, the *telling* of the story presents a fair degree of complexity which gives an urgency to the film's concerns. The flashback rendering allows an extremely formal structuring to the narrative which, nonetheless, in the manner

An Art Deco Hell. In a voluminous empty space, Henry Van Cleve (Don Ameche) and His Excellency (Laird Cregar) listen as Edna Craig (Florence Bates) describes Henry's childhood infatuation with her. *Heaven Can Wait.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FOX

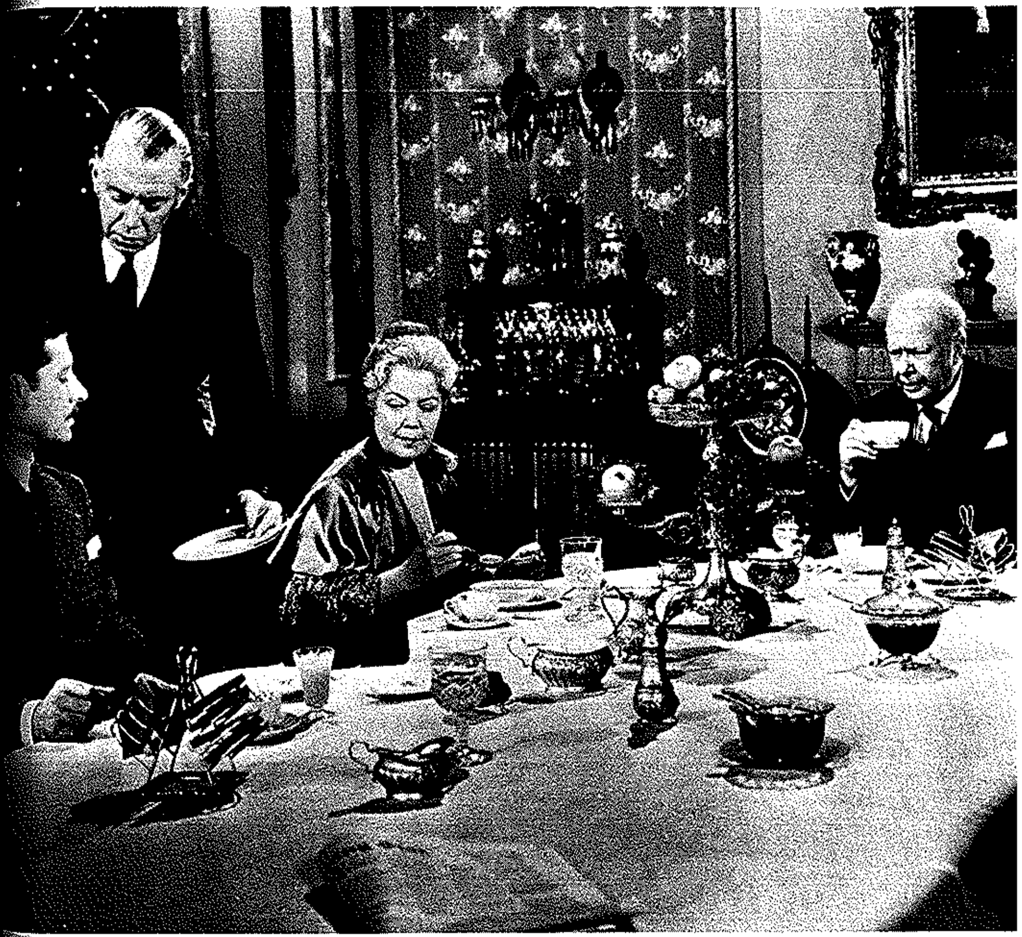


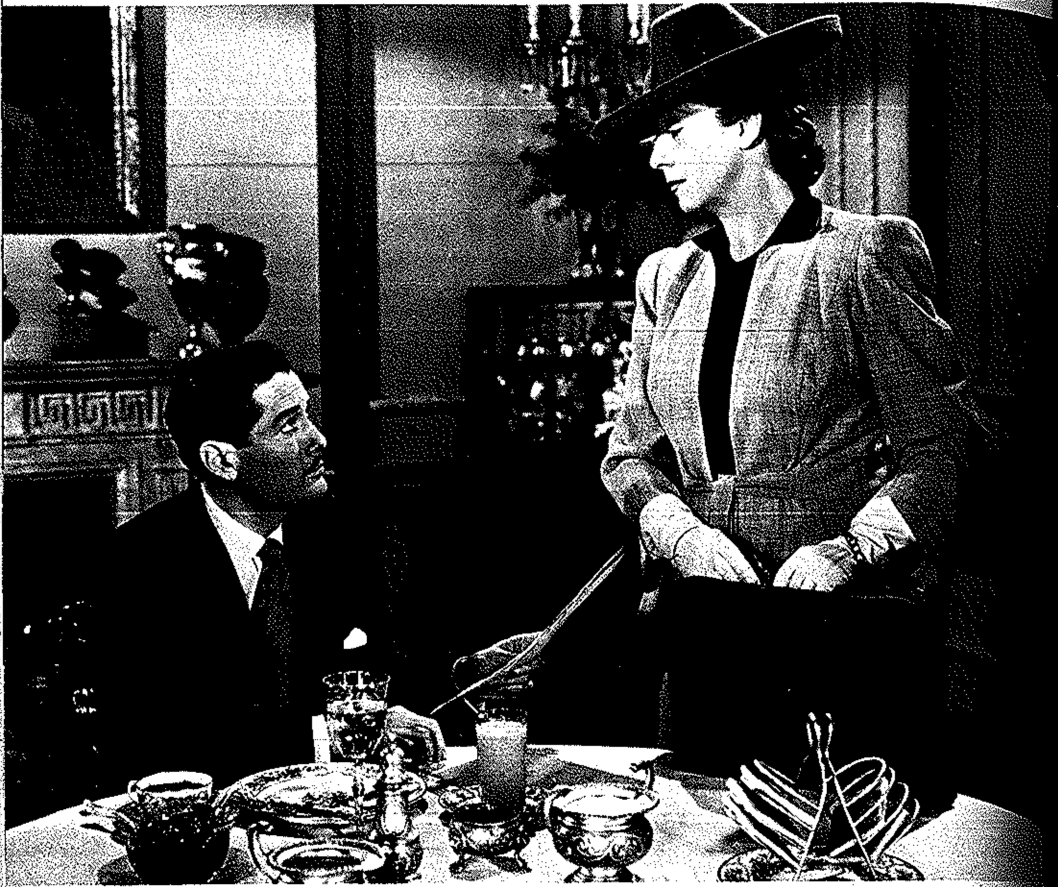
Adolescent Henry (Dickie Moore) lies hungover in bed comforted by Mademoiselle (Signe Hasso) as Henry's father, Randolph (Louis Calhern), Grandma (Clara Blandick), his mother, Bertha (Spring Byington), and Grandpa (Charles Coburn), look on. The ornateness of background and clothing will become more streamlined as the film progresses. This is the last time the entire senior family will be seen in the film. *Heaven Can Wait.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FOX

A breakfast scene with Bertha, her last appearance in the film, and Grandpa as Henry receives a telegram that tells him Martha has left and wants a divorce. *Heaven Can Wait.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FOX



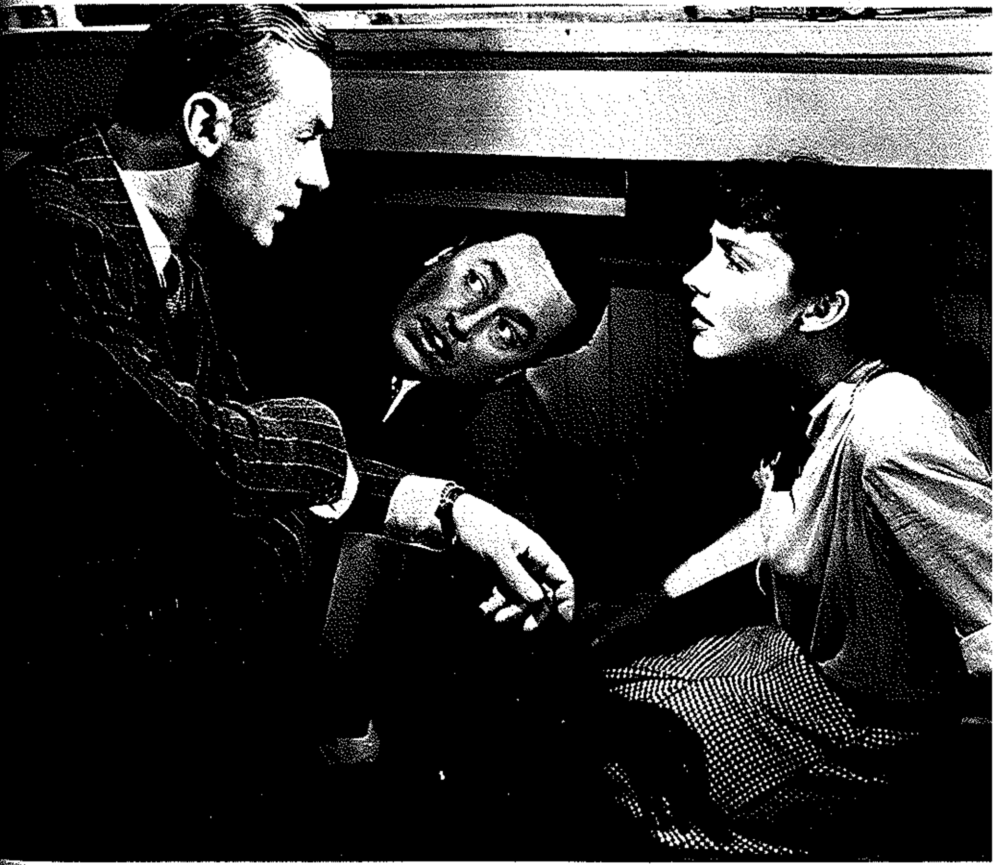


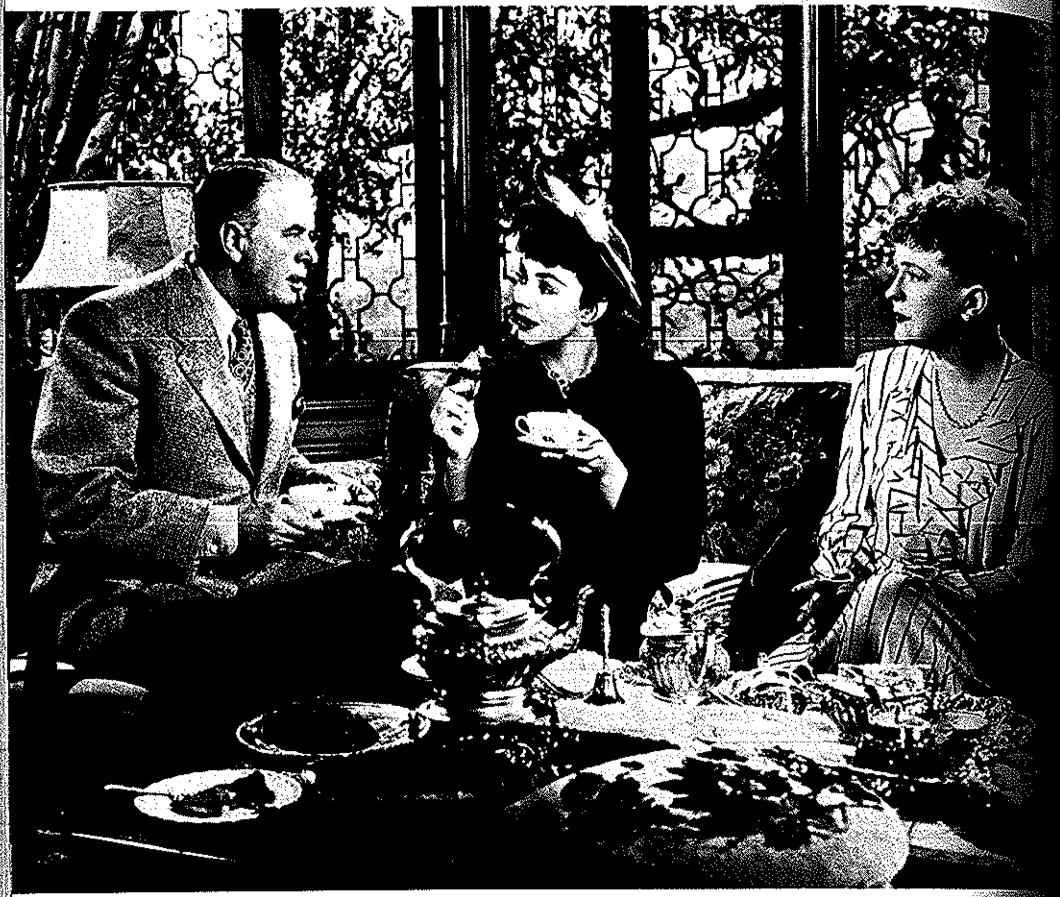
Another breakfast scene, this time with Henry's son Jack (Michael Ames). The business world has finally infiltrated the Van Cleve mansion as mother and wife are replaced by Miss Ralston, Jack's secretary (Claire Du Brey). Compare the furnishings of the dining room here with that of the earlier breakfast scene. *Heaven Can Wait*.

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FOX

Under the sink philosophy. Emigré Adam Belinski (Charles Boyer) explains to would-be plumber Cluny Brown (Jennifer Jones) why it is permissible for her to feed squirrels to the nuts as a bewildered Hilary Ames (Reginald Gardner) listens. *Cluny Brown*.

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FOX



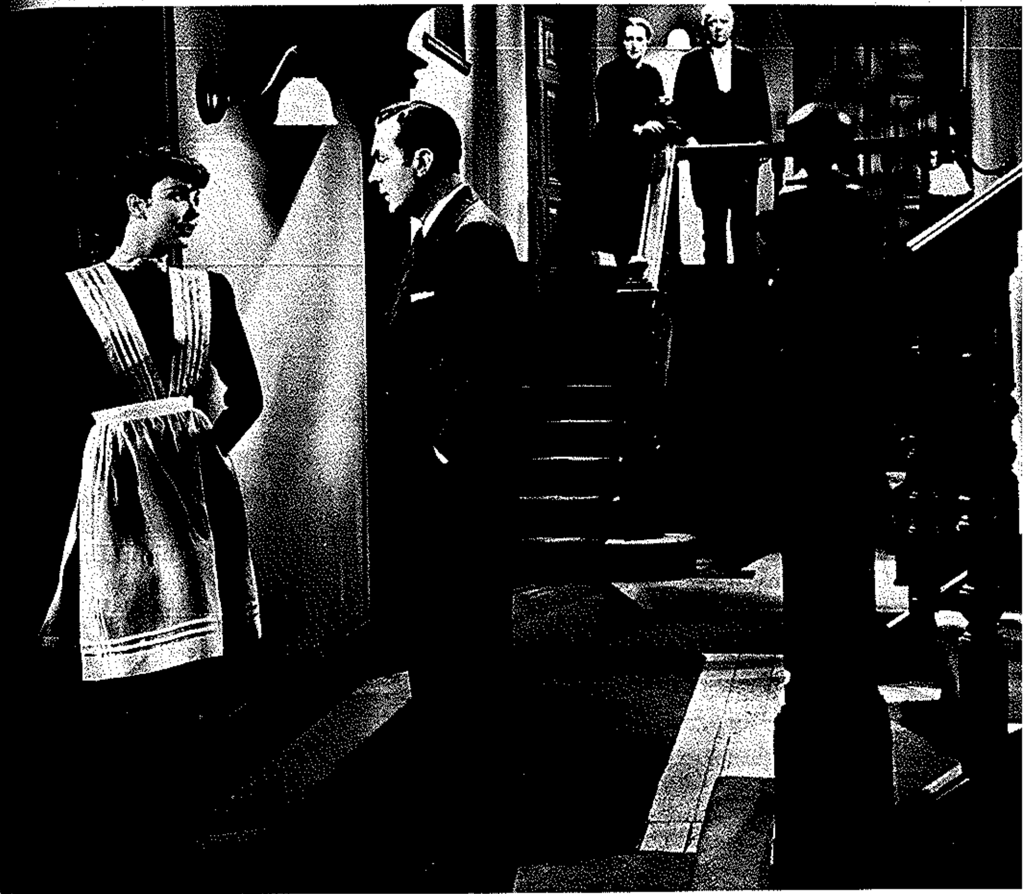


A daytime mixup. Cluny has tea and crumpets with her new employers, Sir Henry Carmel (Reginald Owen) and Lady Alice (Margaret Bannerman), who mistakenly think she is a friend of their neighbor. Sir Henry tries to be ingratiating, while a more reserved Lady Carmel tries to understand the apparently inexplicable comments of Cluny. *Cluny Brown.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FOX

In the background a shocked Mrs. Maile (Sara Allgood) and Syrette (Ernest Cossart) overhear the foreground conversation about plumbing between Cluny and Belinski. This deep, box-like set is typical of Twentieth-Century Fox films from the late thirties on. *Cluny Brown.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FOX



A nighttime mixup. A calm Lady Alice and a less calm Andrew Carmel (Peter Lawford) listen as Belinski explains, not too convincingly, how he happened to end up in the bedroom of Betty Cream (Helen Walker) in the middle of the night. Lady Carmel as usual will take charge of the situation: she quietly sends everyone to bed and tells Betty it is time for her to be married. *Cluny Brown.*

PHOTO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/COURTESY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FOX

of these later works, finds a naturalistic justification in the presence of the narrator himself: if the narrative is as fragmented and selective as those of some earlier films, it is now because the narrator within the film is being selective, so that the choice of narrative events must in part be an expression of his personality. And in the final analysis the presence of the narrator gives the fragmented narrative a greater sense of dramatic continuity than the earlier films possess.

The flashback begins with three brief sequences to establish Henry's relations with women through his childhood, then moves into what will become the pattern for the first half of the film. There are three extended sequences, each centering on a birthday of Henry and each separated from the other by about a decade: Henry's loss of innocence on his fifteenth birthday in the sequence of the French maid; Henry's pursual of Martha, his cousin Albert's fiancée, and their surprise elopement on his twenty-sixth birthday; Martha's return home to Kansas because of Henry's alleged infidelity, his pursual of her on his 36th birthday, which is also their tenth wedding anniversary, and a reenactment of their elopement.

Taken together, these first three episodes present a comic story that is complete in itself: birth in the awakening of adult feelings through the French maid; celebration of life in the elopement with Martha; confrontation with death in the apparent end of the marriage; and a form of rebirth through a renewal of the marriage. The feeling of a falling-off in the second half of the film that both the *New York Times* and *Herald Tribune* critics complained of probably comes from the completeness of the narrative in the first half of the film: as the repetition of the elopement indicates, we have come full circle, and there appears nowhere else to go, yet we know in advance from the frame story that this cannot be the end of the film.

Another dramatic movement is in fact taking place from the first episode on as another pattern of events emerges through the fragmented structure. With each successive episode, we slowly realize, usually with the aid of an indirect comment from Henry's mother Bertha about the dear, late departed, that a character from the previous episode has died in the interval: Grandma after the first episode; Randolph, Henry's father, after the elopement in the second; and finally, after the renewal scene, Grandpa and eulogizer Bertha herself. A pattern of morbid expectation thus sets itself against the romantic comedy, a pattern which is not only fulfilled but perversely escalated after the renewal scene when *two* characters subsequently drop from sight.

As the first half of the film moves toward the conventional rebirth of comic form, it also moves, in a contrary fashion typical of Lubitsch, toward death. I have noted a similar contrary movement in both *The Merry Widow* and *The Shop Around the Corner*, but *Heaven Can Wait* differs from these two films in that its narrative does not stop with the precarious balance reached between birth and death. No Lubitsch film is so pervaded by a sense of death as *Heaven Can Wait* because no Lubitsch film is so filled, as the patterning of departures makes this film, with a sense of the transiency of life. If the second half of the film seems heavier, as critics protested, that is because death in the second half becomes the most salient fact of life. With this change in the tone the structure of the narrative, as if in response to the disturbing undertow that has emerged on calm and regular surface, suddenly becomes unsettled: it spurts ahead by fifteen years to Henry's fiftieth birthday and the episode of Jack's show girl; the expectation of death after this episode is cheated, but then the narrative unexpectedly ebbs to a passage of only one year for Henry's fifty-first birthday and his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary with Martha, after which the film returns to pattern with Martha's death.

Martha's death presents the sharpest break in the formal patterning of the film because it is the only death that is announced beforehand. In announcing the death, the scene itself presents the most explicit definition of the film's vision of death. Henry has just found out that Martha has an illness, but she minimizes its importance. They go out into the main hallway of the mansion to dance in celebration of their anniversary: in a medium shot of the two dancing they move past the doorway into the ballroom through which other dancers may be seen, the camera moving with Henry and Martha. As they dance into an isolated position against a blank-wall background, the camera begins to crane up and back to an extreme long shot until the doorway with the dancers is again visible on the right, and the upper ballustrade of a stairway and the hallway chandelier become visible on the upper left, at which point there is a fade-out. As the camera begins its ascent, we hear Henry's voice-over narration:

> "I didn't know it then, but this was our last anniversary. It was the last time we danced together. There were only a few more months left for Martha, and she made them the happiest of our lives together."

Dramatically the most immediate reason for indicating the death beforehand is to signal a change in our level of awareness as death in the second half becomes the single most important fact of the narrative. After this scene, the film returns in its last two episodes to the decade patterning with Henry's sixtieth and seventieth birthdays, the return to a predictable cycle bringing with it the strong sense that to die is the only thing left for Henry to do with his life. But there is something more in the way the final scene between Henry and Martha is shot that conditions our perception of death in the rest of the film.

To get at the meaning of the style in this scene I first want to look at a visual shift in the way episodes are introduced in the two halves of the film. The three episodes that comprise the first half are all introduced by exterior long shots of the Van Cleve mansion, revealing how the surrounding neighborhood is changing while the mansion remains, in its exterior at least, the same. The second half moves to a more myopic vision as each of the episodes is introduced either by a close-up or a series of insert shots: a montage of birthday cakes, a telegram and a series of ties presented to Henry to introduce the episode of Jack's show girl; an insert of the 25th Wedding Anniversary sign to introduce the last dance between Henry and Martha; an insert of a 60th Birthday Commemorative Album to introduce the episode of his second-childhood attempts to hire a young female reader; and finally a close-up of a medicine chest to introduce the episode of his death. As the first of these restricted views introduces the episode with Peggy Nash, who makes clear to Henry that he is a creature from a past age, the progressively restricted views of the second half of the film provide a visual analogue to Henry's being out of place with his time: his world is becoming literally more isolated, more confined.

The increasing nature of the restriction finds an echo within the house itself. Quite simply, as characters die off, the house grows emptier and the sense of life within it more isolated. The meaning of the crane back as Martha and Henry dance can best be understood in this context of growing isolation: the slow opening up of space in one of the few areas of the house defined by unbroken lines, the increase in volume recalling the framing scenes in Hell. As there is an impending sense of isolation brought on with Henry's advance announcement of Martha's death, there is also a graceful movement away from the increasingly restricted view of the later half of the film because as the camera cranes back the doorway through which other dancers may be seen is reintegrated into the image. As the characters approach a terrible isolation in death, they are also moving toward a kind of rejoining because in death they become part of something larger than themselves, which is history.*

The feelings of isolation and loss here create a mood somewhat similar to John Ford's *How Green Was My Valley*, another family saga also produced at Fox, two years before *Heaven Can Wait*, and also built on a progressive depopulation of a family. The mother, played by Sara Allgood, can remark of her departed sons, one who has died, the other four who have gone to foreign countries, that they are still with her, "They're in the house," because there is a genuinely haunted quality in Ford's film that is achieved through the way he shoots the moments of departure. These are among the most poetic images in the film, endowed with the emotional intensity of a mythicizing mise-en-scène and lighting style that turns figures into statuary. At these moments of departure, the film inevitably creates a feeling of freezing the moment, making it in itself a permanent part of memory that then lingers over the rest of the film as indelibly as the striking image must linger in the viewer's memory.

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*The crane shot is echoed at Henry's death when the camera moves back from the balustrade outside his bedroom door and down across the same hallway to present a similar opening of space. The final shooting script describes this downward movement as Henry's descent to Hell, an effect it does have in the film as well. But the very grace of the movement and the clear echo of Martha's death endow it with more expressive weight than this matter-of-fact explanation suggests. This description is from the screenplay in the personal collection of Samson Raphaelson.

By contrast, the elliptical structure of Lubitsch's narrative in *Heaven Can Wait* never allows the audience to witness the moment of departure. Even that one time when advance word is given with Martha's death, the dynamics of the image, the constant movement both in the dancing of the characters and the craning of the camera, makes it impossible to hold the moment. The film by this movement creates a feeling of transiency, a devastating sense of pastness that can never be recalled any more than the characters who have died could be recalled. Where *How Green Was My Valley* can in fact bring its characters back to life at its conclusion through a memory montage sequence, the focus in *Heaven Can Wait* at its end remains narrowly on Henry. If there is a growing transcendental view in Lubitsch's late work, as I believe there is, it is a transcendental vision that remains focused on concretely observable reality, with none of the comforting quality of Ford's evocation of past lives.

By the time of *Heaven Can Wait* the flashback structure had become something of a commonplace in American movies. Even by the time of *Citizen Kane*, which subsequent critics have praised for its narrative innovations, Otis Ferguson could complain that the "cutback method" was being used too frequently in pictures. Among others one might cite: Garson Kanin's *A Man to Remember* (1938), Sam Wood's *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939), Preston Sturges' *The Great McGinty* (1940), William Wyler's *The Letter* (1940), Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), Sam Wood's *Our Town* and *Kitty Foyle* (both 1940), *How Green Was My Valley*, Raoul Walsh's *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941), and even Walt Disney's *Pinocchio* (1941). In making up this list I do not wish to claim that there had been no films told in flashback before—John M. Stahl's *Only Yesterday* and William K. Howard's *The Power and the Glory* (both 1933) are two striking early examples—but simply that the method was unusual in the past, while it had become very popular around 1940. In part this insistent use of flashbacks can be seen as a natural outgrowth for the strong concern for the past, the historical impulse that I have already noted in the epic films of the period. For example, William Wellman's *Roxie Hart* (1942) and Mervyn LeRoy's *Waterloo Bridge* (1940), both of them remakes of films from about ten years before, employ flashbacks, as the original films had not, to give the narratives a pastness, a sense that the stories in some way reflected the history of a past era.

While the flashback did serve to create a sense of history in these narratives, the films that combined flashback with a strong use of voice-over were probably directly influenced by the radio drama of the period. The years from 1936 to 1938 saw a major expansion in radio drama, bringing closer ties between Hollywood and radio as movies were frequently dramatized into radio plays. As Hollywood thus influenced the development of radio, radio in turn influenced Hollywood. Narration was of course necessary to radio as a means of providing description and evocation that the sightless medium was by its nature denied. Since film had no such problem, the addition of narration might seem a pointless redundancy, yet for the period narration had become such a pervasive means of defining a drama that it even turned up on the stage in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938), right about the same time that Hollywood started turning to it. Even if the medium itself did not require narration for the reasons that radio did, its very presence naturally changed the viewer's experience of the narrative.

The most immediate effect of a voice-over narration is finally to endow talking films with a clear narrative voice: if action had always been primary in films of the past, narration presented it more on an equal footing with interpretation by means of a simultaneous interpretation of the action by the narrator. The voice-over narration helped shape the dramatic narrative by the clearly defined point of view one always took for granted in prose fiction. Even though Lubitsch's own voice had become muted in his later films, the narrative of *Heaven Can Wait* was given the kind of definite point of view that marked his earlier films, but with the important difference that the point of view now belonged to a character *within* the film.

The point of view in *Heaven Can Wait*, the shaping intelligence that informs the way we regard the narrative, is somewhat complicated by the presence of a listener who, unlike the shadowy presence in *Citizen Kane*, is a clearly defined character. As we are made aware in advance, the Devil will play an important role in the outcome of the story, so that how he reacts to the events narrated becomes an

issue as we watch the story unfold. That is, we are as concerned with how he will interpret the story as with how Henry presents it because his interpretation will determine Henry's final destiny. If Lubitsch in *To Be Or Not To Be* achieved a dramatic complexity of attitudes through a constant shifting of tone and dramatic contexts, in *Heaven Can Wait* he seems to be striving for a novelistic complexity through multiplying points of view.

As there is a clear difference in point of view between Henry and the Devil, there is also finally a difference between the point of view of Henry and that of Lubitsch. Most subtly, there are occasional differences in the way Henry regards an event and the way we are made to regard it. For example, on Henry's sixtieth birthday, his son Jack gives him a party and a photograph of the event with his entire family about which Henry notes:

> "The total age of this scintillating assemblage was over fourteen hundred years. I believe Jack gave this party on purpose to remind me that I was contributing sixty years to that fourteen hundred."

There is something of a surprise for both Henry and the viewer in seeing all these relatives, but they are different surprises: for Henry it is the shock of recognizing his age in overly concrete terms; for the viewer it is both this as well as the sudden reminder of how limited the focus of the narrative is, because not one of the characters in this photograph has been seen in the film before.

A more explicit way of distinguishing the author's voice from that of the narrator may be found in incidents and reactions of other characters that Henry himself could not actually witness. Since Henry is a character repeatedly defined by his lack of awareness, there is a real problem of his reliability as a teller of this tale. But Lubitsch's camera often shows us what Henry himself cannot perceive, either about other characters or about himself, and, in showing us, actually helps to reinforce the notion of Henry's naiveté. For example, throughout the first couple of episodes, Lubitsch's cutting constantly separates Grandpa from other characters as a way of marking him for the audience as the prime mover in Henry's life without allowing Henry any awareness of this influence.

When the film does show events at which Henry himself is not present, the chief interest in the narrative seems to be in establishing the world around Henry of which he seems so oblivious. The Strable household in Kansas is established well before Martha's arrival as Martha's place within the household is established well before Henry's arrival. The introductory scene provides important echoes for the rest of the film that are beyond Henry's powers of perception: not only does the middle-class vulgarity of the Strable homestead provide odd echoes of the Van Cleve mansion, but the childish quality and silences of the domestic scene provide an odd foreshadowing of a later domestic scene between Martha and Henry, odd because we assume initially that this is as much an unhappy marriage as we later assume Henry and Martha's is a happy one. The point for Lubitsch is that all marriages involve compromise and concession, and the distance between happy and unhappy is not really that far. Because the author's voice keeps pointing to context and milieu as a frame for Henry's actions and feelings, the milieu becomes the filter through which Henry's view of events is transmitted to the viewer and possibly given a different coloration from what Henry intends.

As films of the period became increasingly concerned with history, the voice-over narration dealt with a problem of film narrative that Christian Metz has brilliantly observed, namely that images have no past tense. The same problem confronts radio as well or any kind of theatrical presentation where the dramatization of an event must take place in the present moment, and each line of a dialogue escapes the pastness so easily conveyed by a simple "he said" in prose fiction. Because the other media present a less complete illusion of reality than film, the various levels of stylization lend themselves more easily to the additional stylization of pastness: the disembodied voice of radio, for example, may take on any tense because it almost seems to exist outside of an exact concept of tense much as it seems to exist outside of an actual body.

In film the present tense reality is simply too palpable in all the concrete detail of a photographic image. For this reason, up through the sixties when the clarity of a classical style finally gave way to more obfuscatory approaches, any attempt to invoke a sense of pastness in the images themselves was frequently accompanied by elaborate opticals or a level of stylization that took the images away from their intrinsic reality and the accompanying sense of present-tenseness: the moving out-of-focus and superimposition of a tuba to provide a musical connective to the past in *The Strawberry Blonde*, the linking dissolves and mythicizing images of the final sequence from *How Green Was My Valley*, the swirling vapors that enclose the memory images at the end of Max Ophuls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948).

For all this recalcitrant present-tense quality of the images and their sense of reality, there is a perversely contradicting ephemerality to the medium in the insubstantial play of light and shadow moving inexorably through time.* In this contradiction, film is the art form most suited for dealing with dreams and memory, for it creates the sensation of something so real it seems to be present and yet is not there at all. Of all the films from this period that sought a historical feeling through flashback, *Heaven Can Wait* comes closest in its attitudes toward fully realizing these contradictions between palpability and insubstantiality inherent in the medium.

The sudden surge in films concerned with memory in the late thirties–early forties, perhaps a response to the war, generally took one of two approaches, although they could on occasion be combined. They were either infiltrated with a kind of nostalgia that saw the past as somehow simpler and better than the disturbing present, although most films taking this approach did so with some qualification: *How Green Was My Valley*, *The Strawberry Blonde*, *Waterloo Bridge*, and Orson Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). Or they might present the necessity of recalling the past as a way of understanding the present: *Citizen Kane*, George Stevens' *Penny Serenade* (1941), Vincent Sherman's *The Hard Way* (1943) and, again, *The Strawberry Blonde*. Oddly, Lubitsch in *Heaven Can Wait* takes neither of these approaches, which makes Leland Poague's assigning the film to the "cinema of Memory" a serious misreading of what Lubitsch is actually doing.

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* Metz has analyzed this contradiction in detail, pp. 3–15.

Alone among the films I have cited, *Heaven Can Wait* most fully plays on the paradoxes between the past tense of the narrative and the present-tenseness of the medium. When the dentist played by James Cagney in *The Strawberry Blonde* first recalls the past, he does so with the intention of justifying his desire for revenging himself on a one-time enemy, but the act of reliving the past injustices gives him a new perspective on himself and weakens his initial desire for revenge: as a result, the vengeance he does extract from Jack Carson along with his tooth is mild and played for comedy. By contrast, there is no real sense of Henry reliving his past as he tells his story and, as a result, no real sense of his understanding his life any better.

Like the characters in earlier Lubitsch films, Henry is resolutely oriented toward the present tense, but in somewhat different fashion. Where the strong libidinal drives of the earlier characters in effect took them outside of time, the bland boyishness of Don Ameche makes Henry's present-tense perspective on life paradoxically rooted in the past. If the character is still oriented toward the present moment, albeit in different fashion from the characters in the earlier films, the author himself is no longer so completely with him. Although the character himself might not see it, the author clearly perceives the great continuity of time and the sense of history that even an individual life contains. Memory does exist in this film in a manner, but it is a peculiar notion of memory in that it is not so much a psychological phenomenon as a metaphysical one, a function of history itself as it exists outside the individual.

I have argued in the introductory chapter that Lubitsch's historical dramas were almost perversely anti-historical in their treatment of the past, cynically reducing all behavior to a set of universals that transcend history. At first glance, *Heaven Can Wait* might seem to be repeating this attitude to the extent that it covers a great period of time with only oblique reference to the historical divisions of the period covered. Yet, in another sense, by virtue of its narrative structure, the film emerges as one of the most profoundly historical in the Lubitsch oeuvre. The movement toward a more expansive narrative style and the coincident concern with historical subjects in the late thirties made the use of flashbacks an almost necessary device. By telling a story in flashback the author can make virtually any narrative material historical; that is, he can make the viewer see the narrative in terms of a larger unit of time, in terms of a context that exists beyond the specific anecdotal material of each scene. As such, the frame story around the actual story in *Heaven Can Wait* is a natural extension of the attempt to provide a context for the narrative that I have noted in most of Lubitsch's later films.

But something more than context is implied by the structure of *Heaven Can Wait:* because we have some awareness of the ending of the narrative at the beginning of the film, our interest naturally shifts from *how* things will turn out to *why* they turned out the way we initially see they did. This is not to say there are no localized elements of suspense along the way, but they are overridden by another concern. The narrative then takes on the form of an investigation, so that in *Heaven Can Wait* we are as concerned with why Henry went to Hell as we are concerned in *Citizen Kane* with why Kane mutters the word "Rosebud" on his deathbed. It is true of any well-structured narrative that individual scenes will contain meanings that might extend beyond their immediate anecdotal concerns, and this extension is what gives the narrative its underlying sense of order and purpose. The difference in *Heaven Can Wait* and other flashback narratives is that we are no longer dealing with underlying meanings. Rather, the connective tissue between scenes provides the most apparent source of meaning, while everything else in effect becomes incidental detail.

For example, when the scene at the Strable household connects Henry's discovery of Martha's flight to his confrontation with her, we must question its presence in the narrative to see if it is relevant to the central investigation on the possibility of Henry's damnation. The scene is simply transitional in the sense that it does not advance the narrative, yet the fact that it centers on a peculiar marriage immediately marks its relevance to the investigatory side of Henry's story. Compare this to the transitional scene in *Design for Living* of Max at his office, which moves from the prologue of how the three main characters meet on the train to the main movement of the narrative. In retrospect a thematic connection may be made out because the scene defines the business world the three characters will later rebel against, but for the moment the scene seems to be simply answering a question raised by Tom and George in the previous scene, namely who is this character and what is his relationship to Gilda. The linearity of the narrative in effect conceals the thematic relationship of the scenes, while in *Heaven Can Wait* it is the thematic relationships that overtly structure the narrative.

As we look at each individual incident with a sense of something larger looming over that incident, the transcendental quality that I have noted emerging in the later Lubitsch films becomes front-and-center in *Heaven Can Wait.* A sense of meaning extending beyond the specific meaning of a scene is made from the first moment to fit into an overall plan which will finally yield, upon examination by the audience, the proper answers for understanding Henry's life. The approach of the film is specifically historical in that the framework by establishing a central question for the narrative makes us examine each scene for a network of causal effects that will lead to an answer.

The framing story exists to establish the purpose of the investigation, but the comic tone of the frame makes clear that the question of Henry's salvation is not to be taken in any specifically religious sense, certainly not in a Christian notion of redemption. Rather, the question might be rephrased to ask if Henry has led a life of any real value, and this brings me back to Lubitsch's own remarks on this character and the purpose of the film. If used in a broad sense, the term "religious" might in fact describe the mood of this film: examining the network of cause and effect that governs an individual life must lead, in retrospect at least, to the feeling of an order larger than any individual's life and a sense of purpose in the patterning of history. Where the ellipses in earlier Lubitsch provided a way of concentrating on what was most important in a scene, in *Heaven Can Wait* they take on a more mysterious quality, mysterious in the profoundest sense of something great and unknowable. Where characters in the earlier films have a firm grasp on the world, in the elusive world of *Heaven Can Wait,* a world beyond absolute understanding, Henry is most blessed by his innocence.

Because the individual exists within this larger, impenetrable order, the examination of *any* individual life, however restricted in focus—and *Heaven Can Wait* is very restricted— must also be an examination of the world in which the individual lives. Lubitsch wrote he encountered resistance in making this film. In Hollywood, encountering resistance means being opposed by the people who control the money, so that Lubitsch's reply on the unimportance of his leading character is an appropriate reply to a business mentality about a man who studiously avoided all business activity all his life. But it is also a deceptive reply: while this man in unimportant for the course of history, by the simple act of living he takes in the whole world and the history in which he lives. *Heaven Can Wait* might be nothing more than the life story of a man who did not amount to much, but it is also nothing less.

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While *Heaven Can Wait* seemed to ignore all major historical and social events of its vast time period, *Cluny Brown* returned Lubitsch to a subject with a strongly political background. The film is set about a year before the outbreak of the Second World War, but the war itself is felt to be imminent throughout, as indeed it would be for an audience looking at the film in 1946. The "1st draft continuity" of the film is dated May 10, 1945, only a few days before Germany surrendered, which means that the work was written during the war although filmed afterward.* As such, the film may be taken as a work of the later years of the war, although it was to be the first postwar Lubitsch film. The date of release no doubt affected the reception of the film, for twitting the English on their blindness toward the Germans might well have evoked hostile attitudes during the war like those aroused by *To Be Or Not To Be.*

The novel by Margery Sharp on which the film is based was itself published in 1944, but the threat of war operates there more as a point of departure than something thoroughly woven into the fabric of the narrative as it is in the film. As *Heaven Can Wait* moved into a more novelistic mode of narrative, *Cluny Brown* was Lubitsch's first sound film actually based on a novel. It was also the first time that Lubitsch worked with material so popular it was likely to be familiar to his audience. As Carringer and Sabbath point out: "Margery Sharp's 1944 novel was an international best seller. It was serialized in *Ladies' Home Journal* (as 'Be Good, Sweet Maid'), was both a Book of the Month Club and Dollar Book Club selection, and was serialized in comic strip form in over 100 newspapers" (p. 170).

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* This copy of the screenplay is on deposit in the collection of the Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, New York. The final film shows a few departures from the continuity, most of them in the form of cut scenes and trimmed dialogue, which are typical of the changes found in earlier Lubitsch screenplays.

In subject matter and character types *Cluny Brown* is more difficult to relate to other films of the period than *Heaven Can Wait*, which had been Lubitsch's most popular film. As is often true with Hollywood's anomalies, success of the subject matter in another form, in this case the novel, most likely facilitated production of the film.

On the most generalized level, the film follows the plot line of the novel. Adam Belinski (Charles Boyer), a European refugee, is the house guest of Lord and Lady Carmel (Reginald Owen and Margaret Bannerman) at Friar's Carmel Manor because their son Andrew (Peter Lawford) admires Belinski's political ideas. Cluny Brown (Jennifer Jones), a young Cockney orphan lass, has been sent into service as a parlor maid at the manor because her Uncle Arn (Billy Bevan), a socially conservative plumber, hopes that the new job will teach her what her "place" in life is. After a nighttime mix-up in which Belinski is discovered outside the bedroom door of the Honorable Betty Cream (Helen Walker), another house guest and the woman with whom Andrew is in love, Betty finally agrees to marry Andrew, who decides in turn to join the RAF, while Belinski leaves for America, much to everyone's surprise (including the reader's in the novel), together with Cluny Brown. Even in this bare outline there is one major difference in the film necessitated by differences in character: Belinski's appearance outside Betty Cream's room in the novel comes about because he is in active pursuit of her, while in the film he has come chiefly to plead Andrew's case. The characters in the film differ in varying degrees from those in the book, most of all with regard to the two leads, Cluny and Belinski. And much as the film follows the plot of the novel in outline, its individual twists and turns are in fact more reflective of earlier Lubitsch, reflections which reveal major changes in his art.

The most significant elements that Lubitsch chose to take from the novel are so much in line with the developments that I have been tracing in his career that they are worth isolating here. The upper-class milieu comes from the book, but of course has its antecedents in earlier Lubitsch. For example, the upstairs-downstairs comedy of the book as developed in the film is actually closer to the style of *Angel* with a clear echo sounded by the casting of Ernest Cossart as the chief butler in both films. In this classbound and restricted rural society of prewar England, character is very clearly defined by social position in the manner of the most recent Lubitsch films, but a singular element new to Lubitsch is the range of classes covered here, and that range derives from the novel.

As the classes expanded, the secondary characters are given a much fuller treatment than in any earlier Lubitsch film, so much so that a reviewer at the time could remark, "Lubitsch places as much emphasis on the lesser roles as he does on the leading parts" (*New York Journal American*, June 3, 1946). Both *The Shop Around the Corner* and *To Be Or Not To Be* had been moving in this direction by granting a greater dramatic importance to secondary roles, but even in those films there remained vaguely defined secondary characters, members of the shop or the troupe who filled up screen space without projecting vivid identities. In *Cluny Brown*, by contrast, all the secondary characters at the least have strongly defined personalities, and in most cases something more than that.

While the political background of the film derives from the novel, it is made more central to the film's narrative by a simple change in the nationality and profession of Adam Belinski. In the novel he is a Polish literary critic whose interest in his subjects' literary output is surpassed by his interest in how much they put out sexually. In the film he is a political philosopher, which gives his flight from Hitler a greater sense of urgency, and he is Czech. The nationality is important because of the different temporal setting of the film: where the novel starts in February 1938, the film is specifically set by an opening title in June 1938, which poses the narrative exactly halfway between the annexation of Austria and the Munich Pact. The Czech nationality of Belinski brings more to the forefront of the film the issue of English confidence in polite gentlemanly behavior that led to the Munich Pact and the fall of Czechoslovakia.

A major structural change in the film's narrative is effected by a prologue which brings Cluny and Belinski together in London before they meet at Friar's Carmel Manor. One critic at the time complained that the prologue, by establishing a relationship between Cluny and Belinski at the outset, effectively took away the surprise ending of the book (*New York Daily News*, June 3, 1946). The change in the film is at the least dramatically shrewd, not just because of the likelihood of the audience's familiarity with the material, but also because the very casting of Jennifer Jones and Charles Boyer would have dictated a romance between the two. Furthermore, the friendship established in the prologue facilitates a plot development that brings *Cluny Brown* close to *Design for Living* as Cluny and Belinski, like the three characters in the earlier film, enter into an anti-romantic pact, swearing friendship and mutual self-help with no sexual involvement.

In the individualist view of earlier Lubitsch, the anti-romantic pact of *Design for Living* provides the characters an unconventional means for achieving a stability of sorts in a phychologically unstable situation; they don't care what society thinks about their arrangement. The pact in *Cluny Brown*, on the other hand, is the result of external circumstances that place constraints of differing natures on both Cluny and Belinski: they are both poor, which makes them dependent on others; within the world of Friar's Carmel Manor they belong to different classes, which makes intimate communication difficult; and, where Belinski in the novel is only thirty, in the film he is substantially older than Cluny, an age difference that places marked restraints on his behavior with her.

Leland Poague sees a specifically autobiographical dimension in the character of Belinski, a suggestion that is evocative of a new quality in this film, but pointless to pursue in a serious manner because the character resemblances are of a most superficial nature. Both Lubitsch and Belinski did emigrate from Europe to America, but that is about the extent of the similarity, and even in this there is an important difference since Belinski is a refugee while Lubitsch emigrated by design. *Cluny Brown* does nonetheless present a kind of artistic and spiritual biography for Lubitsch because it is the most self-reflexive of all his films. For this reason, I would like to look at some of the echoes from earlier work.

Inasmuch as Cluny and Belinski are characters who cannot define themselves in accordance with social norms, they are closest to the characters from *Design for Living* and *Trouble in Paradise*. Yet they are not the anarchists of the earlier films because their opposition to society is quieter, rarely open and, in the case of Cluny, often accidental. The most important reason the opposition is not so strong is that the social order itself has taken on a new meaning for the characters. Characters in the anarchic comedies could achieve an exhilarating sense of self by their opposition to society, but in *Cluny Brown*, as in other late Lubitsch films, the strong sense of context—whether cultural, social, or familial—as a determining factor of character prevails. Because any renunciation of context necessarily brings with it a commensurate renunciation of identity, being an outsider in *Cluny Brown* necessarily spells a greater sense of pain for the characters.

Unlike the elegant thieves in *Trouble in Paradise* or the amorous trio in *Design for Living*, neither Belinski nor Cluny is a *voluntary* outsider: both have been driven from their respective homes; Belinski by force of political circumstances, Cluny by force of social circumstances. For both, a sense of belonging carries with it a positive value that would not have occurred to characters in the earlier films. When Gilda in *Design for Living* seeks stability in a marriage to Max, it is seen from the outset as a mistake, a negative action in running away from the two men she loves to deal with a problem by avoiding the problem. Cluny's engagement to Wilson, who is something of a descendant of Max, might also seem a mistake from the start, but it is preceded by a full dramatization of her wistful sense of homelessness. It is not that the desire for a stable home and a sense of order in life is itself wrong—Cluny presumably achieves this with Belinski at the end—but that Wilson is the wrong man in whom to find these qualities.

In his ability to make himself at home in a totally foreign environment without ever fully feeling at home, in his unconventional manipulation of conventional social situations to his own advantage, and in the strong ironic sense that derives from his status as an outsider, Belinski most directly recalls Gaston from *Trouble in Paradise*. The most apparent differences between the characters are first of all a matter of casting as the brittle high comedy manner of Herbert Marshall's stiffly suave exterior gives way to Charles Boyer's relaxed and weary sensuality. Critics at the time were impressed by Lubitsch's transformation of Boyer into a comic performer, but their surprise was as much based on a misapprehension of Boyer's talents as the earlier surprise about Garbo had been.

Like Garbo, Boyer belonged at the time chiefly to a romantic universe in which he repeatedly gave himself up to the force of his own feelings, combining the vitality of his passion with a kind of weary helplessness in the face of that passion. This standing back quality of watching his own helplessness at the least made Boyer's screen persona open to Lubitschean ironies. But it also endowed the manipulative powers of the character with a less forceful quality than that of Gaston: passivity is a strong element in Belinski's character. *Cluny Brown* takes the critical perspective of the later films toward the kind of social manipulation that audiences were meant to cheer in Gaston in *Trouble in Paradise*.

When Gaston manipulates Filibia into diverting him from any talk of Venice, the playful style of the film itself echoes Gaston's playful maneuvering and fully endorses it, leaving no question which side the audience is on. Something very different happens in *Cluny Brown* when Belinski manipulates Wilson (Richard Hayden), Cluny's fiancé. There is a brief scene between Belinski and Wilson on a country road. After having a few words with Mr. Wilson about his intentions toward Cluny, Belinski gives the appearance that he is about to leave, which has the effect of making Wilson leave. Belinski actually stays in one spot and, after a few seconds, calls Wilson back. Wilson instantly returns, running on Belinski's command. Wilson's run is seen in a sudden shift of perspective from the rest of the scene: a cut takes the camera to a high-angle position which shows Belinski standing in the left foreground with Mr. Wilson further down the road in the right background. As Wilson speedily comes running toward Belinski, the camera cranes down to eye-level in a motion that complements Wilson's movement.

Belinski is clearly toying with Wilson at this point, much as he toys with him elsewhere in the film by ringing his front doorbell and then walking away. He might not be certain of Cluny's affections, but socially he has the upper hand with Wilson, so that he lets him walk away solely to see how quickly he can make him run back. When Wilson does reach Belinski, the question put to him—"You don't drink, do you?" met by his earnest reply of "Oh, no, sir"—may be interpreted two ways by the different characters: while Wilson can perceive his answer as a compliment to himself, Belinski clearly sees it as an insult.

If we laugh at all at Belinski's intended put-down in this exchange, then we have shared in part Belinski's response to Wilson. Yet the shot is not entirely with Belinski. Had it been eye-level with him throughout the action, then the audience would be in much the same position as Belinski, waiting with a slyly malicious pleasure for Wilson to run forward and in the running acknowledge the inferior status which has been conferred on him by an order in which he has an absolute faith. But as the camera is above Belinski, we are effectively detached from his experience of the action. Furthermore, the craning down motion effectively echoes Wilson's forward movement so that we are made to experience the dynamic aspect of Wilson's motion rather than the static aspect of Belinski's stillness. The complementary motion between character and camera establishes a sympathy for Wilson, undercutting Belinski's irony and manipulation to emphasize the vulnerability of a man who considers himself invulnerable.

Complementing the greater passivity of the Lubitsch hero, a calm self-assurance may be seen in Belinski that contrasts with the more nervy behavior of characters in the earlier films. The sharpest change in this regard might be seen in the way Lubitsch now handles the kind of psychoanalytic material he introduced into his films with the neurotic lovers in *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* and *That Uncertain Feeling*. When Belinski visits Betty Cream's bedroom at night to plead Andrew's cause to her, she suggests he might be visiting for his own interests. He denies this, but she immediately offers shrewdly observed telltale signs to the contrary:

> BETTY: Then why is your hair perfectly combed? And why do you smell like a perfume salesman?
>
> BELINSKI (*sniffing*): You're right! That is me, isn't it? . . . You know, that would be an interesting case for a psychoanalyst! I could have sworn that I came here for no other reason than to speak for a friend. Is it possible that when I reached for the brilliantine, way down deep in my subconscious, I was reaching for something else? Betty, I'm beginning to doubt my motives.

Where such an apparent conflict of desires could be troubling for the characters of *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* and *That Uncertain Feeling*, the conflict is only of passing interest to Belinski. He duly takes note of it with requisite curiosity, as if all such vagaries of human behavior were worth noting, then returns to pressing his pleas for Andrew. While he can be interested in Betty's analysis of his subconscious, even convinced by it, he nevertheless goes on with the scene he had originally intended, caring little about the subconscious when the conscious intentions mean so much.

The potential anguish in the tension between inner and outer experiences, private and public lives, was most fully dramatized in *The Man I Killed*, yet it is a tension which almost all of Lubitsch's protagonists experience and which gives a poignant quality to their most comic expressions. Belinski is no less aware of the conflict than the earlier characters, but he is far less troubled by it in large part because he, like Lubitsch, is older. Belinski's age brings him closer to the indulgent ironists of Pirovitch in *The Shop Around the Corner* and Grandpa in *Heaven Can Wait* than to any of the protagonists from the earlier films. With Pirovitch and Grandpa he shares a sense of accommodation that is new to the Lubitsch hero.

Like *The Shop Around the Corner*, the second half of *Cluny Brown* centers on a man waiting for a woman to get over her romantic illusions. But where Kralik in the earlier film must guide Klara to her moment of revelation, Belinski simply waits. One key point of the difference between the two is that Kralik himself must overcome his illusions in order to guide Klara, while Belinski from the opening scene presents himself as a man without illusions: looking at the garbage in Hilary Ames' stopped-up sink, he draws an implicit parallel to his own life which he sees dominated by a sense of waste and weariness. Like Pirovitch and Grandpa, living without illusions himself, he can fully accept the illusions of others with an indulgent acceptance of their inevitability.

Belinski is one of the most ironic characters in the film, but his indulgence mutes his ironies, bending them to a tone of benevolent gentleness. For example, when Andrew, increasingly concerned about the worsening situation in Europe, first says he'll do something about it by writing a letter to the *Times*, then changes his mind to say he'll join the RAF, Belinski replies, "Even better; rise above the *Times*." As he says this, the two men are seen in two-shot, Belinski with his back to the camera, so that the irony must remain quiet, not being underlined by the expression of his face. The irony mocks without ever really devaluing the character it is directed against. In *The Shop Around the Corner* and *Heaven Can Wait*, the gentle ironies of Pirovitch and Grandpa were grace notes, but as they have moved into the central dramatic position in *Cluny Brown* with Belinski, they have also become the dominant of the film's key.

Cluny Brown presents a more balanced dialectic than any previous Lubitsch film between the outsiders and the upholders of the social order. Where Gaston in *Trouble in Paradise* was opposed to the stuffy M. Giron, Belinski in *Cluny Brown* is opposed to one of Lubitsch's most complex comic creations, the exquisitely calm Lady Carmel, who in her own quiet way is as thoroughly the ironist as Belinski. With her perfect social grace and almost total unflappability she presents a positive way of dealing with people and events that expresses total self-confidence in her own correct behavior and the absolute value of her social order. As an insider, she uses irony as a mark of her strength, a way of keeping the surface calm regardless of turbulences underneath, much as Belinski as an outsider frequently reveals his own helplessness in his ironies.

Beneath the calm of her well-ordered existence, Lady Carmel conceals an irony so profound in its penetration of life that it can never be seen through by another character. She puts a soothing end to the social disaster of Belinski being found outside Betty Cream's bedroom door immediately after Betty had screamed by saying, "Yes, strange things do happen in strange houses. Dear me, what an exciting evening!" in a tone of voice that might be applied to an evening playing whist. She is clearly saying a good deal less than she knows about what might have happened, but, unlike Belinski's ironies, her remark is not delivered in such a way that might call attention to its ironic point. Quite the contrary: there is almost a sense that this woman would never admit even to herself that anything had happened other than what each of the participants had explicitly claimed to happen. At the same time, it is inescapable from a subsequent remark to Andrew that he go straight to bed that she does not know something more.

There is an extraordinary moment with Lady Carmel in the scene of Cluny's arrival at Friar's Carmel Manor, extraordinary because of the concentration of meaning in one slight gesture that abruptly and brilliantly reveals everything we need to know about this character and a whole way of life. In a breach of social form, Cluny, who has been mistakenly received as a close friend of their neighbor's, is having tea with her masters, Sir Henry and Lady Alice. Cluny jabbers on throughout the scene about how much nicer the two of them are than she had expected because they are not starving her. The two react to these peculiar comments in different ways: Sir Henry, always ingratiating, takes something of an apologetic tone, while Lady Carmel remains silent for the most part, trying to fit Cluny's remarks into some scheme that would conform to her sense of the world. When Cluny finally says she is the new maid, Lady Carmel replies, "Oh, the new maid! I see," drawing out the last word to indicate the value of the new understanding and, at the same time, reaching forward in a graceful and unobtrusive gesture, the gesture seeming to flow from the word itself, to ring a table bell for the butler. This is the extent of her reaction. She makes no comment on the breach, for she has already integrated it into the proper sequence of events: if Cluny is the new maid rather than a guest, then even this momentary disruption of the normal order may itself, through a flowing and nondisruptive gesture as she reaches for the bell, become a part of that order.

For all the cramped, insular nature of the rigid English class structure that the film observes, that structure is also seen to promote a sustaining self-confidence and certainty about the way of the world that finds its best representative in Lady Carmel. Where the ironic mode belonged *only* to the protagonists in the earlier films, in *Cluny Brown* there is an unstated battle of ironies between Belinski and Lady Carmel. The style of the film itself simply will not allow Belinski's ironies to score against Lady Carmel's confidence as Gaston's had once scored against M. Giron. The difference in the contestants of the two films may be most clearly seen the night of Belinski's first dinner at Friar's Carmel Manor. Both Sir Henry and Lady Alice are in evening clothes, but Belinski must show up in a lounge suit because that represents the extent of his entire wardrobe. As all three walk to dinner, Lady Carmel tells Belinski that he may borrow one of her son's dinner jackets the next evening, explaining that she would like him to accept this offer by means of the following formula:

> LADY CARMEL: Andrew will lend you a dinner jacket, he has two. It isn't really important but, you see, my husband likes me to dress for dinner. But if you didn't dress, he couldn't, and if he couldn't, then of course I wouldn't.*

To this Belinski replies with apparent sincerity, "How simple—and charming—you make everything."

At the beginning of this dialogue, the three are seen in medium shot, the camera tracking with them as they walk through a door.

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* This line derives directly from the novel: ". . . my husband always dresses for dinner, but if he saw you didn't, he wouldn't, and that would worry him, because he likes me to dress, always" (Sharp, p. 60). Lubitsch and his screenwriters reworked this in two important ways. First of all, by putting Lord Carmel's pleasure in his wife's dressing first, the need for Belinski to dress up has been made even more indirect than in the novel. Second, the repeated phrases and rhyming quality in the film make the sense of cause and effect clearer at the same time that they reflect in their orderly manner Lady Carmel's sense of a well-ordered universe.

The camera stops in the main hallway immediately after Lady Alice promises Belinski Andrew's dinner jacket, so that the formula for why he should take it is delivered as the three characters walk into a long shot away from the camera, all three seen from in back, although we see Lady Carmel, who is between the two men, in profile as she talks to Belinski. The tracking motion has given way to a panning motion to the right to keep the group in the center of the frame as they approach the staircase to the dining room; this panning motion itself stops as Belinski speaks his line, but his face is no longer visible, for it is blocked from our view by Lady Carmel.

Lady Carmel's manner of defining a social propriety presents an ingenious way of making a demand in personal terms rather than in the more abstractly formal terms that polite social behavior actually requires. Yet, although the request is made personal, through the complicated chain of causes that she builds up link by link she effectively deflects any individual responsibility for the demand. By stopping the camera just as Lady Carmel is about to say this and thereby increasing our distance from the characters, Lubitsch gives the line something of a throwaway quality, which reflects what the character herself intends, because she does not wish the request to be registered forcefully as a request although it is in fact fairly close to a command. Furthermore, as the camera stops following the still-moving characters, the space around them in effect seems to grow larger: we become more aware of the space that they are transversing as we could not if the focus of the shot were to continue to remain chiefly on them. The distance and stillness of the camera allow the path they take to the dining room to be defined more precisely than it would be by a continuous camera movement. In its own exquisitely complicated and formal manner of expression, Lady Carmel's request becomes something of an extension of the formal arrangement of the house. Since Lady Carmel's formula is in fact far from simple, it is possible that Belinski's reply to her is intended ironically, but the distance of the camera and the blocking of Belinski's face make it finally impossible to determine the intent of his remark. And the gradual explosion of space as the characters move away so defines the rhythm and manner of these characters' lives that Lady Carmel must become the dominant of the shot; she is beyond Belinski's irony here.

Cluny Brown marked a return to active direction for Lubitsch after three years of enforced inactivity because of a series of heart attacks. Like *Angel* before it, which also appeared after a three-year hiatus from direction, *Cluny Brown* reveals changes in Lubitsch's style that are congruent with the direction his films had been taking up to then, but are nevertheless striking because so sudden in development. Put most simply, Lubitsch's camera, one of the most actively commenting in Hollywood, had become one of the most self-effacing. In *Cluny Brown* Lubitsch's style achieved a severe simplicity that is at odds with the more elaborate approaches of the earlier films. The absence of a commenting camera or a strongly heard authorial voice, however, does not mean the absence of a style or a distinctive point of view.

Lubitsch's style continues to be influenced by the dominant Hollywood style of the period: the shots in *Cluny Brown*, for example, tend to be much longer than ever before, much as all of Hollywood was moving toward the obsessively long takes that reached their extreme in the late forties in such disparate works as George Cukor's *Adam's Rib* (1949), John Farrow's *The Big Clock* (1948), and Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948). Perhaps as a concomitant of the longer takes, Lubitsch's camera is more sensitive to his character's movements than in any earlier film, following them about a room with an almost obsessive attentiveness or making slight adjustments in framing by a dolly-in rather than through a cut to signal a shift in emotional emphasis. The cut-and-movement style that I described in *The Shop Around the Corner* is continued here, but quietly carried to an extreme, and it is in this sense of extremity that the film sets itself decisively apart from the dominant style of its period.

To define this most striking change in Lubitsch's style, I would like to look at the first time Belinski visits Betty Cream in her bedroom, when he wants to ask her if Cluny Brown might have the evening off to attend a party. The scene begins with Betty walking into her bedroom: as she is seen in long shot at the door initially, the camera pans right with her across the room to her chair where she sits down to take off her boots. A cut at this point returns us to the starting position of the previous shot of the door as Belinski enters, the camera again following the same route as in the last shot to pan right with Belinski as he goes up to Betty. The cut-and-return movement is a familiar figure of style from later Lubitsch with one key difference: the space that is being shown in the second shot is an exact repetition of the space of the first so that rather than open up the space surrounding the characters, which was the function of this figure in previous films, the second shot becomes redundant.

Previously, Lubitsch would cut to move the camera to a new space from a stationary shot, then use a camera movement to return to the space of the first shot. As the second shot in this scene, however, contains no new space, there is no actual information about character or narrative being advanced in it. In the first shot, we simply see that Betty has returned from horseback riding and is ready to change her clothes. In line with the tendencies of Lubitsch's later style, the definition of space through camera movement in the first shot may be seen as a way of establishing context, even if the action itself is unimportant, before the scene begins. But then this movement is immediately repeated so that the resulting echo must endow the initial movement with something of a different quality than merely revealing space.

Most apparently this setting up of the scene by deliberating over how *both* characters make their entrances slows down the pacing of the entire film and directs the viewer's attention even at the surface level of dramatic experience to something more than simple advancement of narrative. By contrast, the camera of the earlier Lubitsch films seems almost impatient as it cuts out and cuts out and cuts out to the point that what finally appears on the screen simply by virtue of its being there takes on a heightened importance. This new deliberation of the camera in *Cluny Brown* might be seen as a sign of the director's age, a slowing down of the artist's metabolism, a temporal reflection of the simplicity and quietness that dominates the film.

Much as the style presents a clear reflection of a new attitude in Lubitsch, however, it also presents within the world of the film a reflection of Belinski's sensibility, which is dominated by a patient observation of other people. The rhythms of this film move to the rhythm of his character.

While Lubitsch had been moving in the direction of making a character's point of view dominate the film with Henry in *Heaven Can Wait*, the use of style as a reflection of character represents the sharpest break with his earlier approach where the style always kept the characters at an ironic distance through a separate and sharply pronounced authorial voice. How much Lubitsch has departed from the method of even a fairly recent film might be seen by contrasting the one Lubitschean door in *Cluny Brown* with a door routine from *Ninotchka*. When Belinski visits Cluny in her room after her first, disastrous job of serving a meal, Cluny, upset and crying, spontaneously embraces Belinski because of the sympathy he has offered her. Suddenly realizing the impropriety of the gesture, she breaks away, a shocked expression on her face, and runs out her bedroom door. As she runs out, the camera dollies forward slightly until Belinski no longer appears in the frame, and then rests on the door, calmly waiting for Cluny to return, and signaling in its moment of rest that she *must* return. In *Ninotchka* the camera also stays on a door at one point to show the conversion of the three envoys to Leon's brand of decadent capitalism through a movement in and out of successive waiters and cigarette girls, each new arrival bringing increasingly loud off-screens "ooohs" and "aaahs" of appreciation.

Ninotchka does follow the more naturalistic manner of the later film by justifying the camera's movement in on the door as the camera follows a waiter who walks to the door. But there is finally no narrative justification for remaining on the outside of the door as the transformation takes place inside. The camera remains focused on the door simply because the director chose to put it there, so that even the most naive audience cannot view the scene without some awareness of the author's presence in the narrative. In *Cluny Brown* the camera remains in Cluny's room looking at the door after she has run out because Belinski remains rooted in one spot, so that the discretion of the camera at this point becomes a reflection of his own discretion and patience as he quietly waits for Cluny to return. Even though the camera stays trained on the door in *Ninotchka*, there is still a sense of constant activity by the constant comings and goings and the off-screen noises. In *Cluny Brown* there is only silence and empty space. While the camera may reflect Belinski at this point, it nonetheless moves him out of the shot so that the empty space may complement the stillness of the moment because this is a film made up of waste spaces and waste moments.

If the style of Lubitsch's earlier films was emphatic in its concentration on isolated details, then the slowness in the repetition of space and movement in *Cluny Brown* takes the style to the most extreme opposite direction. This does not mean, however, that what we are seeing is in fact inessential. By its very selectivity, even the most naturalistic narrative art must deal with essentials to the extent that everything which finally makes its way into the narrative has been selected for its importance: what we do see is clearly more important to our understanding any story than what we don't see. Throughout the film, scenes repeatedly begin with a character entering a room, joining another character, or perhaps then being joined by someone else. Just as frequently scenes end with one character leaving the room, the camera dutifully following the departure. By the attention the camera gives to them, entrances and departures are made a central concern of the film.

As comedy of manners at its foundation is concerned with social interaction, *Cluny Brown* is a film of entrances and exits, arrivals and departures. People repeatedly define themselves by how they come together, how they see each other by how they approach one another: only in society is character fully realized. The repeated movements create a cyclical pattern that, on a smaller scale, reflects the cycles that are central to the narrative structure of *Heaven Can Wait*. As the dramatically unessential becomes the essence of the drama in these repeated movements, a concern for the quotidian aspects of life infiltrates the narrative. In contrast to the high point style of the earlier films, the special quality of these waste moments is that they endow even the most ordinary aspects of life with a preciousness.

Even though *Cluny Brown* falls in with the longer-take style of its period, the film oddly contains a more insistent use of reaction shots than any previous Lubitsch film. Although reaction shots represent a key figure of style in American screen comedy, Lubitsch's use of them in previous films had been fairly restricted. In most conventional applications, the reaction shot by providing one point-of-view on an action becomes a way of conditioning the audience's reaction, either pointing out a comic nature to an action that might not be inherently comic or simply underlining the comic quality. In the films of Laurel and Hardy, for example, the frequent reaction shots of Ollie place the absurdity of Stan's action itself within a context of "normality" that allows the audience to perceive a comic point both in Stan's actions and in Ollie's reaction. Lubitsch's occasional use of reaction shots in the past had been pretty much in this mode as a means of lambasting stuffy secondary characters, getting humor out of their calcified reactions to a slightly improper situation. There is something of the same thing in *Cluny Brown* when Syrette (Ernest Cossart) and Maile (Sara Allgood), the butler and the cook of Friar's Carmel Manor, accidentally overhear a nighttime conversation between Belinski and Cluny and draw improper conclusions. But the reaction shots here do not so much put down the characters as establish their different perspectives for reasons that will become clear when I return to this scene later in the chapter.

To complement the central concern of the characters in *Cluny Brown* with social propriety, the reaction shots serve as a way of defining what actions individual characters think proper or improper, and virtually every character in the film is granted a reaction shot to define his or her point of view at some moment. Although the style of the film generally reflects important facets of Belinski's character, no other Lubitsch film is so generous to the differing points of view of secondary characters, and it is for this reason that secondary characters are more fully felt than in any other Lubitsch film. When Cluny serves her first dinner and makes the mistake of advising Sir Henry which piece of mutton to choose, there follows a series of reaction shots that go beyond simple comic point-making to a genuine delight in the differing responses of different characters and how those responses serve to define their individuality: 1) Lady Carmel looking surprised and bemused, not quite certain what to make of

Cluny's unusual behavior; 2) the butler Syrette shocked and thoroughly disapproving; and, following a shot of Henry actually taking the piece Cluny recommended, 3) Belinski smiling with approval at Cluny's accomplishment. By coming last, Belinski's view of the scene is allowed to prevail, but the reactions of the other characters are by virtue of the cutting given equal time. Because Syrette's reaction is not a simple duplication of Lady Carmel's, it must be clear that we are dealing with something more than simply shocked propriety. What finally emerges is a thematic concern similar to *Angel:* the way of seeing an event is determined by one's expectations and prejudices. Unlike *Angel*, *Cluny Brown* more specifically sees class as a determinant of perception.

Like *Angel*, *Cluny Brown* opens with a case of mistaken identity, and mistakes in identity continue through the exposition to establish a pattern about perception and social expectation through the rest of the film. Hilary Ames (Reginald Gardner) finds himself in a troubling situation: he is giving a party, but his sink is stopped up, there's a terrible stench, and he has spent all his Sunday trying to locate a plumber. When Adam Belinski arrives, Ames immediately takes him for the plumber because that is what he has been expecting. Much as he is conditioned to accept Belinski as a plumber, he is not at all prepared to accept the plumber who finally does arrive in the person of Cluny, because young girls in his society are not supposed to go in for plumbing.

The opening scene establishes a pattern of social situations conditioning judgments that turn out to be wrong. Uncle Arn cannot see Cluny's uniqueness because he can only see people in terms of their place, and she, as he so often tells her, "doesn't know her place." When Colonel Duff Graham (C. Aubrey Smith) meets Cluny on the train and learns she is going to Friar's Carmel Manor, he takes her to be a guest of Sir Henry and Lady Alice because he could hardly have been carrying on an extended conversation with one of their servants. In a kind of chain reaction, Henry and Alice take Cluny naturally as their social equal because Colonel Duff Grahame could hardly be presenting one of their servants to them. Finally, Cluny, who is torn between desires for a sense of belonging and a life of adventure, sees the dull and prosaic Wilson as heroically romantic because he is a man whose existence has a rooted certainty to it. If Belinski is the one character who never enters into illusions comparable to these, that is because he constantly stands back from making judgments.

As this pattern is repeated throughout the film, the social comedy at the center of the drama most frequently derives from conflicting perceptions that are determined by the differing contexts of each individual. There is frequently a gap between the perception that the social order dictates and the actuality, but this can be extended to a more personal level where all the individual characters in their unique individuality have differing perceptions of events as determined by their psychological make-up. Like Henry in *Heaven Can Wait*, Belinski is the one character in *Cluny Brown* who repeatedly speaks in a metaphorical language, and like Henry's, Belinski's metaphors are subject to varying interpretations. Here is Belinski trying to convince Cluny that Wilson is finally not the man for her:

> BELINSKI: Look here, Cluny. Out there is an ocean, and on the ocean is a boat—braving the storm and battling the billows. That's not Mr. Wilson. But in a quiet harbor there is a freighter. Its engine is turned off—no smoke comes out of its funnel. Nothing could ever budge it—neither wind nor wave. That's Mr. Wilson.
>
> CLUNY: Oh, I'm so glad you like him!

Even Belinski's fairly direct suggestion of impotence in his remark on Wilson's smokeless funnel cannot deter Cluny from her romantic view of Wilson because Wilson does offer her life a meaning she actively seeks by offering her a home, but she is in effect confusing two desires.

If Belinski from his opening speech on the symbolic significance of Hilary Ames' stopped-up sink is the most metaphorical character in the film, it is because he is outside the normal class distinctions of this society. Metaphor implies a ranging beyond normal categories, an ability to see one thing as something other than itself. Cluny might confuse appearances in her conflicting desires, seeing something in Wilson that is not in fact there, but she also approaches

Belinski's metaphorical quality on a naive level, either in drink when she talks about her "Persian cat feeling" or in sleep when she dreams of Belinski on a black stallion, endowing him with the sexual potency which his smokestack metaphor denied Wilson. But Cluny's metaphors can only be released subconsciously through alcohol or sleep: metaphor is given the meaning of a freeing of the subconscious that takes the user of metaphor outside the pathways of normal thought and, by implication in the terms the film establishes, outside the pathways of normal behavior.

Belinski himself explicitly states the need for moving beyond normal perception by moving beyond normal thought patterns when he advises Cluny to ignore her Uncle Arn's complaint that she does not know her place:

> "Nobody can tell you where your place is. Where's my place? Where's anybody's place? I'll tell you where it is! Wherever you're happy—that's your place. And happiness is a matter of purely personal adjustment to your environment. You're the sole judge. In Hyde Park, for example, some people like to feed nuts to the squirrels. But if it makes you happy to feed squirrels to the nuts, who am I to say nuts to the squirrels?"

At first glance Belinski might seem to be expressing a kind of extreme individualism that comes close to the attitudes of *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living*, but there is in fact something quite different in these remarks because Belinski cannot see personality apart from the environment and is in fact consulting a kind of adjustment to the environment. That is, not everything in a personality springs entirely from within; rather, there is a reciprocal interaction between personality and environment. On the other hand, he is not presenting an argument for the enforced accommodation the musicals propose because environment is no longer so thoroughly at odds with the individual.

The language he uses to present his attitude, "squirrels to the nuts," which will become a verbal leitmotif through the film, is itself nonsense, a logical impossibility that accepts and embraces the illogic of each individual personality cast against the orderly logic of a set social system. Every accommodation must itself be illogical because there is a paradox at the foundation of the accommodation: each individual is a nonentity without the identifying power conferred on him by the dominant society, and yet he is also something that moves apart from that society. In its illogic the language expresses a sense of compromise that is outside the range of both the uncompromising anarchists of *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living* and the reluctant conservatives of the musicals.

Cluny's innocent rebellion from her society takes a form that was familiar to audiences of the period because her passion for plumbing allies her with women in other movies of the period who engaged in professions that had been predominantly or exclusively male: Irene Dunne's lady mayor in *Together Again* (1944), Ginger Rogers' managing magazine editor in *Lady in the Dark* (1944), Ingrid Bergman's psychiatrist in *Spellbound* (1945), Joan Crawford's entrepreneur in *Mildred Pierce* (1945), Myrna Loy's judge in *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer* (1946), Loretta Young's senator in *The Farmer's Daughter* (1946), and Jean Arthur's congresswoman in *A Foreign Affair* (1948). To some degree *Ninotchka* anticipated these films in that it focused on a woman doing a man's work and finally having to give up that work for the sake of love. But these later films are more the product of the war years which saw women increasingly moving into male professions as men went off to war. Even more clearly, these films seem to represent male fears of women performing jobs supremely well: where Ninotchka's no-nonsense behavior was itself an attraction for Leon, the very femininity of the women in these later films is frequently called into question as their jobs are made out to deny the sexual aspects of their characters. In *Cluny Brown* the marriage to Belinski works contrarily to provide professional fulfillment: Belinski proposes by promising to give Cluny the opportunity to plumb as much as she likes. Cluny's plumbing is certainly the most masculine activity undertaken by a woman character of the period, yet the film never subscribes to the dominant attitude of the time that would see an opposition between this profession and the character's femininity. The resolution of opposites in this character is most fully realized in the casting of Jennifer Jones.

Although in her mid-twenties, Jones throughout this period of her career repeatedly played adolescent girls who grew up in the course of the film. Growth could take the form of religious obsession as in *The Song of Bernadette*, or more commonly a sexual awakening that would move her into conflict with family or society. Because Jones was always *first* seen as a child and retained something of a childlike quality throughout her performance, even the most overtly erotic behavior—and the most lurid as in King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*—retained an unexpected innocence. Jones is sexual without being aware of her own sexuality.

Cluny Brown plays on this unawareness in her passion for plumbing by making other characters upset by the baseness of the activity without Cluny herself seeing the impropriety of it all. And even after her successful go at Hilary Ames' stopped-up sink and her first martini in celebration, she provocatively stretches out on a couch and with an open sensuality describes her "Persian cat feeling," much to the discomfort of Ames, without realizing in the least that she is being provocative. She is not actually seductive when she describes the joys of plumbing, recalling how she likes to "roll up my sleeves, loosen a joint—Bang! Bang! Bang!" for she herself is too unaware of her meaning, yet it is clear in the scene that this almost erotic pleasure she finds in her work is an attraction for Belinski.

Much as Jones' screen persona projected contradictory images of innocence and sensuality, Cluny is torn between the desire to belong, to have a definite place in life, and the desire to go beyond conventional behavior. If profession in other films of the period meant to women a means to an end other than profession itself, most often marriage, for Cluny the profession has its own meaning, and it is one that goes against the dictates of society. As she is innocent about her own sexual desires, she is unlike the rebels of the earlier films in that she is unaware of her rebellion. More like Henry in *Heaven Can Wait*, she is the innocent who unquestioningly accepts the values of her society.

> One main difficulty in *Cluny Brown* is that comedies about snobbism seem, as a rule, to depend on stimulating and playing up to, rather than shriveling, the worst kind of snobbism in the audience. In spite of this, Ernst Lubitsch's direction—always at its best, so shrewd about protocol—makes the film more amusing than there was any reason to expect. (p. 90)

James Agee's complaint might be extended beyond "comedies about snobbism" to comedy in general because any comedy, inasmuch as it makes us laugh at characters, necessarily places our sensibility above theirs. A comedy about snobbism of course contains an internal paradox to the extent that laughing at a character's snobbish behavior is itself a form of snobbism. That is, when we laugh at Maile and Syrette, for example, as they demean Cluny and Belinski, we are in fact demeaning Maile and Syrette. The fact that Lubitsch's direction made Agee equivocate on this point may be taken as the fullest measure of the change in Lubitsch's attitudes because his earlier comedies might well be described as snobbish in their elitist sensibility. I have suggested in my discussion of *To Be Or Not To Be* that Lubitsch was directly confronting the elitist implications of comedy itself for the sake of his political meanings. Direction is the key to understanding the attitudes of these films because manner is usually the key to understanding comedy. In the quiet but compelling give-and-take treatment of all the characters in *Cluny Brown*, Lubitsch gives even the most apparently negative characters their moment of sympathy and understanding.

Consider, for example, the discussion between Syrette and Maile after they have witnessed a nighttime conversation between Cluny and Belinski. (I have earlier mentioned this scene for its reaction shots of the shocked listeners and the appropriate comic points similar to those won from secondary characters in earlier films.) Unlike earlier films, the scene continues with these characters, honoring their separate existence so that they become something more than mere comic foils for the protagonists. After Belinski leaves and Cluny goes back to her room, Lubitsch cuts to a medium shot of Mrs. Maile on the left and Syrette on the right, with their subsequent dialogue played out in a single take.

SYRETTE: Well, Mrs. Maile?

MAILE: I agree with you, Mr. Syrette. But then—it's difficult to get servants to come to the country.

SYRETTE: What can you expect—a maid without references and a foreigner who isn't even in the diplomatic service.
(both sigh)

I hesitated to tell you, but now I believe I should. This foreign gentleman rose at dinner and addressed me directly!

MAILE: Oh, no!

SYRETTE: Yes, Mrs. Maile. Sir Henry and Lady Carmel's guest spoke to me as an equal.

MAILE: (*closes eyes and shakes head, shudders*): Good-night, Mr. Syrette.

SYRETTE: Good-night, Mrs. Maile.

At this point the two characters walk into their separate rooms, Mrs. Maile to her door against the wall on the left of the image, Mr. Syrette to his door against the back wall. As they walk off, both moving at the same pace, the camera slowly tracks back at a similar speed until the image, plunged into near darkness when Syrette switches off the light just before entering his room, fades out.

The snobbery here is of a peculiar sort since Maile and Syrette object not to Belinski's lording it over them, but the fact that he could treat them as equals. They seek the maintenance of their lower place in the social order as a confirmation of their existence. And much as this might be a subject for comedy, it nonetheless relates to Cluny's attempt to find a place for herself with Mr. Wilson. There is in fact a kind of sympathy suggested between two sets of characters by the mise-en-scène just before this exchange between Maile and Syrette: as Cluny and Belinski form one couple in complete sympathy with one another as they stand in Cluny's doorway, Maile and Syrette form another couple standing by their doors. As a couple, Maile and Syrette have reached an understanding with one another so harmonious and responsive that Syrette need make no other remark than "Well" and Mrs. Maile immediately agrees with him.

The movement of the camera at the end of this scene opens up the space in a manner similar to that at the end of the scene in which Lady Carmel requests Belinski to wear Andrew's dinner jacket. As in the earlier scene, we become aware of architecture and how it determines character movement and behavior. The moment when the two walk in their rooms and the camera moves back is especially striking because of its sudden quietness, another of the suggestive *temps morts* that are woven through the fabric of this film's style, a quietness that must, in retrospect, transform the nature of the scene from one of simple comic point-making about the servants' inverted snobbery. By moving the camera in a different direction but at the same speed as the two characters, Lubitsch unites their movements, making them seem part of one whole, and in this unison endows their departure with a ritualistic quality.

The inverted snobbery that is the source of comedy in this scene is gradually transformed through this gradual camera movement as we grow aware through the greater emphasis on architecture that these characters belong in their little boxes precisely because they have put themselves there, because they feel secure in their rituals and conventional perceptions of the world. They are like a married couple in their perfect understanding of one another, in fact an idealized couple, yet their rigorous sense of propriety must send them into their separate spaces. The graceful movement of the camera, the sudden quietness after the comic points, the darkness of the image all give this exchange a haunting quality that keeps the characters from being grotesques. They are suddenly humanized through the unexpected dimension of a real tenderness to one another that is checked by the restrictions in their lives.

Much as the film does play on various snobberies of the characters and the audience itself, no character in the final analysis is superior or inferior to any other. Even Belinski, who in his frequent ironies might seem to set himself above other characters, is held in check both by the balancing counterforce of Lady Carmel and by the style of the film itself. For example, when Lady Carmel tells Belinski just before he retires on his first night at Friar's Carmel Manor, "Oh, by the way, there's a nightingale under your window," Belinski replies archly, "Oh, you shouldn't have gone to the trouble." For one of the few times in the film, Lady Carmel seems at a loss because a familiar social formula, the kind of thing she should be completely at home with, is slightly off in its application even though it is delivered in the proper context of praise for a gracious hostess. The breach of conduct is not so much that Belinski is being ironic about the nightingale with Lady Carmel, but that he is being so overtly ironic. As the remark cannot possibly be read as anything other than a twitting of polite formulas, it seems to demand a response of recognition from

Lady Carmel, which is the last thing this character could give. In the dialogue exchange alone Belinski seems to be scoring a comic point off Lady Carmel's sense of polite behavior, yet the shooting style of the scene suggests something different because Lubitsch keeps the characters in two-shot throughout. Rather than supporting the comic point of Belinski's line as a reaction shot might have done and allying the audience with Belinski's attitude, the two-shot by keeping Belinski in view of her flustered reaction suggests a rare breach of decorum.

The severe simplicity of the style in this film, the culmination of the change I have been charting in Lubitsch's films, gives *Cluny Brown* an exquisitely measured quality that lends an element of gravity even to the most ridiculous characters. Some critics have referred to the secondary characters as "caricature," yet as the camera endows them with a life independent of the main characters and suggests moments of vulnerability, even pain, in their confined existences, Lubitsch approaches the delicately balanced ironies of Jane Austen. As the camera is sensitive finally to all the characters at different moments in the narrative, it endows all the characters with an importance that could not be found in the earlier films. With great simplicity and an unassuming air, Lubitsch in *Cluny Brown* achieved a radical and unconventional reworking of the comic traditions behind his earlier films.

10

THE REBIRTH OF COMEDY

At the end of *Cluny Brown* Belinski and Cluny find themselves in a train to London on the first leg of their journey together toward America and an uncertain future. The scene clearly echoes the final scenes of *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living:* in all three films the leading characters leave behind a repressive society in search of a putatively freer existence. The scene in *Cluny Brown* nonetheless differs markedly in tone, both because of the way the scene is filmed as well as because of the attitudes of the characters. While the final scenes of *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living* take place in the dead of night, encasing the characters in an indefinite darkness that reflects their indefinite futures, the scene on the train in *Cluny Brown* is in broad daylight, the train compartment flooded with light and the bright countryside speeding by visible throughout the scene. Where the journeys in the earlier films underlined the characters' apartness from their world, *Cluny Brown* continues, even as the characters leave their society behind, to see the characters in a larger context.

At first Cluny and Belinski seem to be embracing poverty much like the trio in *Design for Living* when Belinski tells Cluny they might be able to afford only one meal a day, and sometimes not even that. Yet when Cluny cheerfully accepts this possibility, Belinski suddenly reverses himself and says he will give up his philosophical treatises and write best-selling detective novels so that he may build Cluny a large mansion with exquisitely complicated plumbing. Where the characters in the earlier films sought to retrieve a lost past, Cluny and Belinski are specifically and expectantly oriented toward the future. The future itself is magically realized, as it remains unknown in the earlier films, through a brief, wordless epilogue that shows Belinski's success as a popular author and the fulfillment of the marriage in Cluny's pregnancy. Belinski's sudden reversal marks the sharpest break in mood and purpose from the earlier Lubitsch comedies: of all the works of his mature career, only *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown* present such a full rounding of the comic circle.

Henry at the end of *Heaven Can Wait* moves through his death to a kind of rebirth as he is reunited with past generations of his family. World-weary Belinski at the end of *Cluny Brown* is revitalized through his union with Cluny as he begins a new profession and fathers a child. In both films, connections are established that go beyond the temporal limitations of the individual's life. Drawing on F. M. Cornford's study of the ritualistic origins of Greek comedy, Wylie Sypher sees a movement toward rebirth as the quintessential feature of comedy:

> From the anthropologist's view the tragic action, however inspiring and however perfect in artistic form, runs through only one arc of the full cycle of drama; for the entire ceremonial cycle is birth: struggle: death: resurrection. The tragic arc is only birth: struggle: death. Consequently the range of comedy is wider than the tragic range—perhaps more fearless—and comic action can risk a different sort of purgation and triumph. . . . Comedy is essentially a Carrying Away of Death, a triumph over mortality by some absurd faith in rebirth, restoration, and salvation. (p. 220)

If a darkening undertow rippled through Lubitsch's earlier films, it was because they flowed with the current of an individualistic view that, by its very orientation toward the individual, maintained a strong awareness of death.

Suzanne K. Langer has set comedy against tragedy by noting of tragedy, "Its conception requires a sense of individuality which some religions, and some cultures—even high cultures—do not generate." (p. 334). Langer offers a biological definition of comedy that makes of it a vitalist celebration of life's ability to maintain its equilibrium, the constant renewal of life by life. Every individual life is tragic inasmuch as every individual must die. But, by virtue of its broader vision, comedy celebrates the survival of the species. As Lubitsch's earlier films flowed from their isolated streams into the communal ocean of the late work, as the current in his films flooded from the individual in particular to society at large, he became more fully a comic artist.

In 1947 Lubitsch began work on *That Lady In Ermine* (1948), his first musical in thirteen years. Otto Preminger completed direction of the film when Lubitsch died halfway through production. Samson Raphaelson has remarked that Lubitsch, having recently suffered another heart attack, seemed drained during the screen writing and willing to fall back on familiar formulas. The final film is difficult to evaluate because Lubitsch did not finish it, but it does seem to be operating, perhaps intentionally, at a lesser level of creation than the work immediately preceding it.* Like the weary Belinski in *Cluny Brown* leaving behind his political philosophy for lightweight fiction, Lubitsch was turning from his heavier, reflective late works to embrace a lighter, carefree form. But the film is not all familiar formulas, and although it uses a Ruritanian setting again, it has a more distinctly historical sense than any of the earlier musicals, situating itself in a specific time and connecting the current events of the narrative to a historic past. Operating at a much lower intensity, the film does nonetheless possess glints of the transcendent feeling of *Heaven Can Wait* as it ties together different generations through a spiritual as well as familial connection that the Lubitsch of the earlier musicals would not have understood.

In his social vision, Lubitsch was moving away from a direction being staked out by post-World War II comedy. If comedy as a form depends at root on a belief in the future of life, then the ingenuity of man's destructive intelligence realized in an atom bomb over Hiroshima offered the most radical challenge to comic form by raising the possibility of a universal annihilation. On the stage the Theater of the Absurd sent comedy in a particularly bleak direction, while Hollywood comedy moved into the harsh world of *film noir* through

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* Carringer and Sabbath report that Preminger did not use the ending which Lubitsch had filmed, but rather substituted a reprise of an earlier musical number (pp. 172–73).

Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (particularly in its fantasy sequence), Leo McCarey's *Good Sam* (1948), Charles Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), and Howard Hawks' *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949). Even a minor item like *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948) could turn the post-World War II dream of a blissful middle-class suburban existence into a nightmare.

When Cluny and Belinski leave behind a class-bound English society on the verge of a European war to travel to peaceful and classless America, the film in no way trivializes the deadly seriousness of the impending war itself; comedy, as always, remained a serious form for Lubitsch. As the expectation of the war hovers over the entire film, no audience in 1946 could consider an escape to America as an escape from the war itself. Similarly, *Heaven Can Wait* offers in advance something of a qualifier for its happy ending through the sense of death that infiltrates the second half of the film. Yet in tone both films have the most thoroughly positive happy endings in Lubitsch's oeuvre, replacing the suspensions of the earlier films with a resoundingly struck dominant. Where the strong libidinal drives sent the individualistic characters of the earlier films on a flight from death that circularly led to death itself, where characters moved from a quest for free action to compulsion, from liberation to constraint, the characters in the last two films find an open-endedness in the very limitations of their lives as they become part of the continuum of history.

The slower and quieter quality of the last two films signals a new serenity in Lubitsch's vision, a calm acceptance of death as a fact of every individual life, but finally not of Life itself. Lubitsch's earliest films, the slapstick comedies of the teens in which he starred, had conventional comic endings, fully according a triumphal rebirth to the hero through his social ascendancy. As Lubitsch's art matured, he questioned the convention itself either through having his happy ending return his characters to a status quo that transformed the narrative's movement toward growth into retrogression, or through an equation of sexual fulfillment with a deathlike static existence. In *Heaven Can Wait* and *Cluny Brown* Lubitsch maintained in the body of each work the exquisite balance between tragic and comic impulses, between the shifting views of man as an individual and man as an element of society, that gives his best work its distinctive flavor. Yet, in their endings, Lubitsch tipped the scales toward life, and toward full-bodied comedy. Face-to-face with his own mortality through a series of progressively debilitating heart attacks, Lubitsch paradoxically became more comic in his vision: himself confronting death, he managed to see the constantly renewing life of society, the connectedness of every finite individual to the infinity of history.

ERNST LUBITSCH: SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

This filmography contains only those films cited in the text.

GERMAN FILMS

Schuhpalast Pinkus (The Pincus Shoe Emporium) (Union Film, 1916)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, Erich Schönfelder; set design: Kurt Richter.

With Ernst Lubitsch (Sally Pinkus), Else Kenter (Melitta Herve).

The story of a young shoe clerk, Sally Pinkus, who winds up the successful owner of a shoe store thanks to the patronage of a famous dancer, Melitta Herve.

Die Augen der Mummi Ma (The Eyes of the Mummy Ma) (Union Film, 1918)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, Emil Rameau; cinematography: Alfred Hanson; set design: Kurt Richter.

With Pola Negri (Ma), Emil Jannings (Radu), Harry Liedtke (Wendland).

A tragic love triangle of Egyptian dancer Ma and English painter Wendland, who flee Egypt for England together, and Radu, the Egyptian in love with Ma who pursues them.

Die Austernprinzessin (*The Oyster Princess*) (Union Film, 1919)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly; cinematography: Theodor Sparkuhl; set design: Kurt Richter.

With Ossi Oswalda (the Oyster Princess), Victor Janson (Quaker, the Oyster King), Harry Liedtke (Prince Nuki), Julius Falkenstein (Josef, servant of Nuki).

The "Princess," daughter of the American millionaire "Oyster King," wants to marry European royalty. After a mix-up in which the Princess seems to marry the servant of the impoverished Prince Nuki, a manic fox trot, and a bizarre women's boxing match, the Princess finally beds down with the proper prince to the satisfaction of her Oyster King father.

Madame Dubarry (Union Film, 1919)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, Fred Orbing; cinematography: Theodor Sparkuhl; set design: Kurt Richter; costume design: Ali Hubert.

With Pola Negri (Jeanne Vaubernier, the future Mme. Dubarry), Emil Jannings (Louis XV), Harry Liedtke (Armand de Foix).

The story of the milliner's apprentice Jeanne Vaubernier, her rise to become mistress of King Louis XV, and eventually being sentenced to death during the French Revolution by her original lover, Armand de Foix.

Die Puppe (*The Doll*) (Union Film, 1919)
Screenplay: Lubitsch, Hans Kräly; cinematography: Theodor Sparkuhl; set and costume design: Kurt Richter.

With Ossi Oswalda (the Doll), Hermann Thimig (Lancelot), Victor Janson (Hilarius, the dollmaker), Max Kronert (Baron von Chanterelle).

In order to receive a large amount of money from his uncle, the Baron von Chanterelle, Lancelot must marry. He doesn't want to, so he buys a life-size doll from Hilarius, the dollmaker. Unbeknownst to either Hilarius or Lancelot, the doll is actually impersonated by Hilarius' daughter. After much confusion, Lancelot recognizes, to his delight, the human reality of his mechanical bride.

Anna Boleyn (*Anne Boleyn*) (Union Film, 1920)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, Fred Orbing; cinematography: Theodor Sparkuhl; set design: Kurt Richter; costume design: Ali Hubert.

With Emil Jannings (King Henry VIII), Henny Porten (Anna Boleyn), Paul Hartmann (Sir Henry Norris), Ferdinand von Alter (Mark Smeton).

Although in love with Sir Henry Norris, Anna Boleyn becomes the mistress of King Henry VIII and eventually marries him. Dissatisfied with Anna after she gives birth to a girl, Henry pursues Jane Seymour. Finally enraged by cunning intimations from court singer Smeton of Anna's alleged infidelity with Norris, Henry has Anna sentenced to death. The film ends with her being led to the scaffold.

AMERICAN SILENT FILMS

Rosita (United Artists, 1923)
Screenplay: Edward Knoblock, Norbert Falk, and Hans Kräly, from a play by Philippe François Pinel Dumanoir and Adolphe Philippe Dennery; cinematography: Charles Rosher; set design: Svend Gade; costume design: Mitchell Leisen.

With Mary Pickford (Rosita), George Walsh (Don Diego), Holbrook Blinn (King), Irene Rich (Queen).

A seventeenth-century Spanish king becomes enamored of a street singer, Rosita, who has composed a satiric song about his amorous exploits. Rosita in turn loves a Spanish nobleman, Don Diego, who has been condemned to death. The rest of the film becomes something like *Tosca*, but with a happy ending: bowing to Rosita's pleas for her beloved, the King arranges for a fake execution, but then withdraws the order after Rosita leaves. The fake execution of Don Diego is nonetheless staged on orders from the Queen, a step that finally leads to the King returning to his Queen while Don Diego is reunited with Rosita.

The Marriage Circle (Warner Brothers, 1924)
Screenplay: Paul Bern, from a play by Lothar Schmidt; cinematography: Charles J. Van Enger.

With Adolphe Menjou (Professor Joseph Stock), Monte Blue (Dr. Franz Braun), Florence Vidor (Charlotte Braun), Marie Prevost (Mizzie Stock), Creighton Hale (Dr. Gustav Mueller).

Mizzie Stock, whose marriage to Professor Joseph Stock is on the rocks, takes out after the husband of Charlotte Braun, an old friend. The husband, Dr. Franz Braun, constantly resists Mizzie's advances, which usually take the form of asking for a medical examination. Finally, Charlotte learns that her husband has been named as the other man in a divorce action brought by Professor Stock. To even the score, she tells Franz of advances made to her by his partner, Dr. Gustav Mueller. The Brauns are then happily reunited, while Gustav leaves with Mizzie. Remade as *One Hour With You* (1932).

Three Women (Warner Brothers, 1924)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, from a novel by Iolanthe Marees; cinematography: Charles J. Van Enger; set design: Sven Gade.

With Pauline Frederick (Mabel Wilton), May McAvoy (Jeanne Wilton), Marie Prevost (Harriet), Lew Cody (Edmund Lamont), Pierre Gendron (Fred Armstrong).

Jeanne Wilton marries Edmund Lamont, not knowing he is her mother's former lover. Once married and made secure by the Wilton wealth, Lamont takes up with gold-digger Harriet. Fred Armstrong, Jeanne's college boyfriend, inadvertently reveals Lamont's affair with Harriet to Jeanne. Jeanne goes to see Harriet and, to her astonishment, learns of her mother's involvement with Lamont. The mother, Mabel Wilton, goes to ask Lamont about a divorce for her daughter, but when Lamont refuses, threatening scandal, the enraged mother shoots Lamont. A sympathetic jury acquits the mother, and Fred and Jeanne are happily united.

Forbidden Paradise (Paramount, 1924)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, Agnes Christine Johnston, from a play by Lajos Biro and Melchior Lengyel; cinematography: Charles J. Van Enger; set design: Hans Dreier.

With Pola Negri (the Czarina), Rod La Rocque (Alexei), Adolphe Menjou (Chancellor), Pauline Starke (Anna), Fred Malatesta (French Ambassador).

In a small, unidentified European kingdom, Alexei, lover of the Czarina, yearns to be an important person in government affairs, but the Czarina only wants him in his subservient position as lover. Alexei becomes involved in a revolt against the Czarina that is squelched by the Czarina's crafty Chancellor. The Czarina will not condemn Alexei, but she also cannot bring herself to pardon him until the Chancellor introduces her to a young French Ambassador in whom she sees her future lover. Alexei is pardoned and reunited with Anna, the Czarina's lady-in-waiting and former betrothed of Alexei.

Kiss Me Again (Warner Brothers, 1925)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, from a play by Victorien Sardou and Emile de Najac; cinematography: Charles J. Van Enger.

With Monte Blue (Gaston Fleury), Marie Prevost (Loulou Fleury), Joch Roche (Maurice Ferriere), Clara Bow (Grisette), Willard Louis (Dubois).

Gaston Fleury agrees to divorce his wife Loulou, who he believes is in love with pianist Maurice Ferriere. Lawyer Dubois, who is handling the divorce, tries to stage a scene, with his secretary Grisette as a witness, in which Gaston will hit his wife, but Gaston cannot go through with it. Instead, he pretends to Loulou that there is someone else. For a while it appears this someone else is Grisette, a mistake Gaston encourages because it makes Loulou jealous. Having grown tired of Maurice, Loulou soon learns the truth of Gaston's supposed affair with Grisette, but in preparation for her reunion with her husband, she pretends to believe Gaston so that his male ego may be soothed by a sense of his own supremacy.

Lady Windermere's Fan (Warner Brothers, 1925)
Screenplay: Julien Josephson, from the play by Oscar Wilde; cinematography: Charles J. Van Enger; set design: Harold Grieve.

With Ronald Colman (Lord Darlington), Irene Rich (Mrs. Erlynne), May McAvoy (Lady Windermere), Bert Lytell (Lord Windermere), Edward Martindel (Lord Augustus).

Returning to England from living on the continent, Mrs. Erlynne reveals to Lord Windermere that his wife is her illegitimate daughter. Lord Windermere agrees to help her financially if she will remain apart from Lady Windermere, but Lady Windermere soon learns of her husband's relationship to Mrs. Erlynne and suspects a romance. Outraged, she responds to the advances of Lord Darlington and places herself in a compromising situation from which she is saved by Mrs. Erlynne. In doing this Mrs. Erlynne has risked a marriage prospect to Lord Augustus, but at the end of the film she sets out for France, and Lord Augustus sets out with her.

So This Is Paris (Warner Brothers, 1926)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, from a play by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy; cinematography: John Mescall; set design: Harold Grieve.

With Monte Blue (Dr. Paul Giraud), Patsy Ruth Miller (Suzanne Giraud), Andre Beranger (Maurice Lalle), Lilyan Tashman (Georgette Lalle).

Dr. Paul Giraud gets involved with an old flame, dancer Georgette Lalle, while Suzanne Giraud takes up with the dancer's husband, Maurice Lalle. Neither of these affairs is actually consummated, but at an artists' ball Paul and Georgette do win a Charleston contest that is presented with a Dionysiac fervor. After a masked Suzanne flirts with Paul and leads him home, she unmasks herself. Penitent Paul resumes his happy conjugal relations with his wife.

The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1927)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, from a story by Wilhelm Meyer-Forster and an operetta by Dorothy Donnelly and Sigmund Romberg; cinematography: John Mescall; set design: Cedric Gibbons, Richard Day; costume design: Ali Hubert.

With Norma Shearer (Kathi), Ramon Novarro (Prince Karl Heinrich), Jean Hersholt (Dr. Juttner), Gustav von Seyffertitz (King Karl VII).

Prince Karl Heinrich is raised by his tutor, Dr. Juttner, a man as warm and compassionate as his father, King Karl VII, is cold and distant. At age 18, the prince is sent for his education to Heidelberg, where he meets and falls in love with Kathi, a waitress at the inn where he lives. The old king, however, has arranged for a marriage to a princess. As the king lies dying, the Prince agrees to his father's final request: he renounces Kathi and enters into a marriage with the princess.

The Patriot (Paramount Pictures, 1928)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, from a play by Alfred Neumann; cinematography: Bert Glennon; set design: Hans Dreier; costume design: Ali Hubert.

With Emil Jannings (Czar Paul the First), Lewis Stone (Count Pahlen), Florence Vidor (Countess Ostermann), Neil Hamilton (Crown Prince Alexander).

Prime Minister Pahlen, known as a loyal patriot, mounts a conspiracy to remove the tyrannical Czar Paul from the throne and crown Paul's son Prince Alexander as the next czar. Pahlen is ruthless in his "patriotism," even using his own mistress, Countess Ostermann, as bait for the czar. The conspiracy is eventually successful, but Pahlen himself is shot, victim to all his schemes.

Eternal Love (United Artists, 1929)
Screenplay: Hans Kräly, from a novel by Jacob Christoph Heer; cinematography: Oliver Marsh; set and costume design: Walter Reimann.

With John Barrymore (Marcus Paltram), Camilla Horn (Ciglia), Victor Varconi (Lorenz Gruber), Mona Rico (Pia).

Marcus and Ciglia are in love, but through a melodramatic combination of circumstances Marcus is forced to marry Pia. Ciglia in response marries Lorenz Gruber. The original lovers, continuing to love each other, deliberately walk into the path of an avalanche, choosing love in death rather than no love in life.

AMERICAN SOUND FILMS

The Love Parade (Paramount Pictures, 1929)
Screenplay: Ernest Vajda and Guy Bolton, from a play by Leon Xanrof and Jules Chancel; songs: Victor Schertzinger (music), Clifford Grey (lyrics); cinematography: Victor Milner; set design: Hans Dreier; costume design: Travis Banton.

With Maurice Chevalier (Count Alfred), Jeanette MacDonald (Queen Louise), Lupino Lane (Jacques), Lillian Roth (Lulu).

Count Alfred is called before Queen Louise to be reprimanded for his amorous escapades in Paris, but she ends up falling in love with him instead. Alfred's valet Jacques and the queen's maid Lulu also fall in love. Alfred and Queen Louise marry, but Alfred bridles under the restraints of being a queen's husband until he and the queen are able to determine that, in private at least, he should be boss.

Monte Carlo (Paramount Pictures, 1920)
Screenplay: Ernest Vajda and Vincent Lawrence, from a play by Hans Muller and sections of the operetta *Monsieur Beaucaire* by Booth

Tarkington and Evelyn Greenleaf Sutherland; songs: Richard A. Whiting and W. Franke Harling (music), Leo Robin (lyrics); cinematography: Victor Milner; set design: Hans Dreier.

With Jack Buchanan (Count Rudolph Farriere), Jeanette MacDonald (Countess Helene Mara), Claud Allister (Duke Otto von Liebenheim), ZaSu Pitts (Bertha, the countess' maid).

Countess Helene flees from her intended marriage with Duke Otto to Monte Carlo to gamble at the roulette tables. There Count Rudolph sees her and, to be close to her, pretends to be her hairdresser. After Helene almost marries the duke again because she has lost her money, Rudolph reveals his true identity at a performance of *Monsieur Beaucaire*—which has a similar plot of a nobleman masquerading as a hairdresser.

The Smiling Lieutenant (Paramount Pictures, 1931)
Screenplay: Ernest Vajda and Samson Raphaelson, from a novel by Hans Muller and an operetta by Leopold Jacobson and Felix Doermann; songs: Oscar Straus (music), Clifford Grey (lyrics); cinematography: George Folsey; set design: Hans Dreier.

With Maurice Chevalier (Niki), Claudette Colbert (Franzi), Miriam Hopkins (Princess Anna), Charlie Ruggles (Max), George Barbier (King Adolf).

Standing in a crowd to watch a royal parade, Franzi waves and blows a kiss to her lover, Lieutenant Niki. Niki winks back at her, but just at that moment a royal carriage is passing by, and shy Princess Anna, who is in it, thinks that Niki has winked at her. Niki is ordered to marry Anna, which he dutifully does, but the marriage remains unconsummated until Franzi arrives and gives Anna lessons in how to be a real woman. The lessons apparently work as Niki, confronted with the new and more sexually alluring Anna, easily forgets his former lover.

The Man I Killed (a.k.a. *Broken Lullaby*) (Paramount Pictures, 1932)
Screenplay: Samson Raphaelson and Ernest Vajda, from a play by Maurice Rostand; cinematography: Victor Milner; set design: Hans Dreier.

With Lionel Barrymore (Doctor Holderlin), Nancy Carroll (Elsa), Phillips Holmes (Paul), Louise Carter (Frau Holderlin), Tom Douglas (Walter Holderlin).

Paul, a young Frenchman, has killed Walter, an equally young German soldier, in the final days of World War I. Overcome with feelings of guilt, Paul travels to the small German town of his victim in search of the dead boy's family. Initially hostile, Walter's parents and his fiancée Elsa soon accept Paul as a friend, for they mistakenly think he was Walter's friend in life. The rest of the town continues to be outraged by the presence of this Frenchman, but in the family he is quickly taking over the dead man's place, even to the point of becoming engaged to Elsa. Still overpowered by his sense of guilt, Paul tells Elsa his actual relation to Walter and wants to tell the parents as well, but she prevents him because she sees he must continue to fill the void of Walter's absence and try to restore the wholeness of the family.

One Hour With You (Paramount Pictures, 1932)
Screenplay: Samson Raphaelson, from a play by Lothar Schmidt; songs: Oscar Straus (music), Leo Robin (lyrics); cinematography: Victor Milner; set design: Hans Dreier; costume design: Travis Banton; assistant director: George Cukor.

With Maurice Chevalier (Dr. Andre Bertier), Jeanette MacDonald (Colette Bertier), Roland Young (Professor Olivier), Genevieve Tobin (Mitzi Olivier), Charlie Ruggles (Adolph).

A musical remake of *The Marriage Circle* (1924). The most important plot difference is that here Andre (Franz in the original) apparently does sleep with Mitzi (Mizzie in the original), which totally unbalances the wife's attempts to establish a *quid pro quo* at the end.

Trouble in Paradise (Paramount Pictures, 1932)
Screenplay: Samson Raphaelson, from a play by Laszlo Aladar; cinematography: Victor Milner; set design: Hans Dreier; costume design: Travis Banton; music: W. Franke Harling; lyrics for title song: Leo Robin.

With Miriam Hopkins (Lily), Herbert Marshall (Gaston Monescu), Kay Francis (Mariette Colet), C. Aubrey Smith (Adolphe J. Giron), Edward Everett Horton (François Filibia), Charlie Ruggles (The Major).

In an old hotel in Venice, super-thief Gaston Monescu, who has just robbed a fellow hotel guest, François Filiba, has dinner with Lily, something of an accomplished thief herself. They fall in love as they pick each other's pockets. Moving to Paris, they fall on hard times until Gaston steals the expensive purse of perfume-heiress Mariette Colet. Returning the purse to Mariette for the reward, Gaston proves attractive enough for Mariette to hire him as her personal secretary. Soon Lily is in Mariette's employ as well, and plans are under way for the thieving duo's biggest heist. Gaston, unfortunately, threatens to upset everything by genuinely falling in love with Mariette.

Three crises quickly follow each other: Adolphe J. Giron, chairman of the Colet board of directors, accuses Gaston of wrongdoing, which prompts Gaston to prove that Giron in his own modest way is an even bigger crook, embezzling from the Colet company; then, François, one of Mariette's two ineffectual suitors, remembers Gaston from Venice and reveals his true identity to Mariette; finally, Lily shows up at Mariette's at the time that was intended for an assignation between Mariette and Gaston. Mariette fatalistically accepts the duplicity of her employees and allows them to escape without trouble from the police. In a cab on the first leg of their journey to Germany, Lily and Gaston engage once again in their pickpocket competition, revealing how much they have in fact taken from Mariette's house.

"The Clerk" from *If I Had a Million* (Paramount Pictures, 1932)
Screenplay: Ernst Lubitsch.

With Charles Laughton (Phineas V. Lambert).

A clerk receives a check for a million dollars and gives his boss the raspberry.

Design for Living (Paramount Pictures, 1933)
Screenplay: Ben Hecht, from the play by Noel Coward; cinematography: Victor Milner; set design: Hans Dreier; costume design: Travis Banton.

With Fredric March (Tom Chambers), Miriam Hopkins (Gilda Farrell), Gary Cooper (George Curtis), Edward Everett Horton (Max Plunkett), Franklin Pangborn (London producer).

On a train *en route* to Paris from the south of France, commercial artist Gilda Farrell meets two fellow Americans, playwright Tom Chambers and painter George Curtis. Both men soon fall in love with her, and since Gilda loves them both equally, she suggests a solution that will sublimate their romantic energies into fruitful work: she will live with them as a full-time critic and promoter, a self-styled "Mother of the Arts," but for the sake of friendship, all will refrain from sex.

Max Plunkett, the prudish head of an advertising agency, thoroughly disapproves of this arrangement, but it does seem to be working until Gilda convinces a London producer to stage one of Tom's plays. With Tom's departure, Gilda finds it impossible to live up to her "no sex" pledge: she sleeps with George. Tom returns many months later to find Gilda alone and very happy to see him. Because she has missed him desperately and felt her life incomplete without him, she now sleeps with him. When George returns the next morning to discover Gilda's and Tom's faithlessness, Gilda, distraught at the situation she has caused, leaves both men and enters into what she assumes will be a safe, bourgeois marriage to Max. The marriage is in fact too safe: Gilda is bored to distraction until Tom and George suddenly show up after a long trip to China and disrupt a polite party for business associates that Max is giving. Seeing her salvation in the two men, Gilda gratefully leaves with them. In the dead of night, the three ride off in a taxi cab pledging a return to their past life and "no sex."

The Merry Widow (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1934)
Screenplay: Samson Raphaelson and Ernest Vajda, from the operetta by Victor Leon and Leo Stein; songs: Franz Lehar (music), Victor Leon and Leo Stein (lyrics); additional songs: Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, and Gus Kahn; cinematography: Oliver T. Marsh; set design: Cedric Gibbons; costume design: Ali Hubert and Adrian; choreography: Albertina Rasch.

With Maurice Chevalier (Danilo), Jeanette MacDonald (Sonia), George Barbier (King), Una Merkel (Queen), Edward Everett Horton (Ambassador to France), Sterling Holloway (Danilo's orderly).

In the mythical kingdom of Marshovia, Captain Danilo woos the wealthy widow Sonia, attracted by the mystery of her black veil. Sonia rebuffs him, but secretly responds to his advances until she learns from her maids that he is quite the ladies' man, in fact promiscuous. Disappointed, Sonia decides nonetheless to give up her period of mourning: she leaves immediately for Paris. With the widow away in Paris and being courted by Frenchmen, the King of Marshovia fears that she will take all her money out of the country and send Marshovia into financial ruin. Consulting his Queen on who the most attractive Marshovian might be, the King sends Danilo, actually the Queen's lover, to Paris to woo and wed the wealthy widow.

In Paris, Sonia learns of Danilo's arrival and follows him to Maxim's, something of a high-class brothel that has the kind of women Danilo prefers because they do not think about "tomorrow" or make any demands on him.

At the cafe, Sonia attracts Danilo, who has never seen her face, by passing herself off as one of the "Maxim's girls," but when she cannot bring herself to act without a concern for consequences he realizes that she is what he sneeringly calls a "lady." Still, much as he sneers he discovers that once having danced with Sonia to the tune of the "Merry Widow" waltz he has truly fallen in love with her. The apparent hopelessness of his situation sends him to drink, but on the strict order of the Marshovian ambassador to France he must sober up in time to court the widow. Discovering the widow is in fact the woman he loves, he tries to court her honestly. She doesn't believe him, but he provides conviction by dancing with her, once more to the tune of the "Merry Widow" waltz. All is ready for a perfect resolution until they overhear the overzealous ambassador announcing to guests assembled in the next room the engagement of Sonia and Danilo. Feeling that she has once more been betrayed, Sonia rejects Danilo.

Back in Marshovia, Danilo is on trial for treason because his suit of Sonia has been unsuccessful. Sonia makes a surprise appearance at the trial, testifying that Danilo had in fact used every ruse a wooer could possibly use. Danilo protests that he does in fact love her, that he is now willing to accept a monogamous life, and for this he should be hanged. Unable to stay away from Danilo, Sonia visits him in his jail cell where the two find themselves locked in by the King and his associates. Nature takes its course as the King expects: Danilo and Sonia pledge their faith to each other.

Angel (Paramount Pictures, 1937).
Screenplay: Samson Raphaelson, from a play by Melchior Lengyel; cinematography: Charles Lang; set design: Hans Dreier, Robert Usher; costume design: Travis Banton; music: Frederick Hollander.

With Marlene Dietrich (Lady Maria Barker/Angel), Herbert Marshall (Sir Frederick Barker), Melvyn Douglas (Anthony Halton), Laura Hope Crews (Duchess Anna Dmitrievna), Edward Everett Horton (Graham), Ernest Cossart (Walton), Dennie Moore (Emma).

In Paris, Lady Maria Barker visits the proprietress of an apparent brothel–gambling house, the Grand Duchess Anna, an old friend and possibly former employer of Maria. Here Maria meets Tony Halton, who initially mistakes her for the Grand Duchess. Maria, merely identifying herself as "Angel," spends the night with Tony, vanishing after the affair is over without revealing her true identity.

In London, Sir Frederick Barker returns from a League of Nations conference in Geneva, only to find his wife already asleep. She gladly wakes up for him, but their intimacies are soon interrupted by important political events. The marriage is revealed as unexciting and, following Frederick's extremely rational mode of dealing with political events, repressive in that the emotional problems between husband and wife are never fully confronted. This stalemate of a marriage is challenged when Frederick runs into Tony at the racetrack: Tony identifies himself as an old friend, even though they have never met before. It seems that during the Great War when they were soldiers they both had the same lover behind the lines in Paris. Frederick invites Tony to his house, where Tony discovers that they once again have the same lover. Tony smugly assumes that Maria/Angel will leave with him now that he has found her again, but Maria refuses to accept the identity of Angel. Maria forces Tony to leave, but Tony asks her to meet him at the Grand Duchess' in a week.

Disappointed when Frederick cancels a vacation because of political difficulties, Maria goes to Paris for her assignation with Tony. Frederick, now aware that his marriage is on the verge of collapse, follows Maria to the Grand Duchess'. Here he finds out the truth of Maria's past, but in a sense he can never fully comprehend how this person from the past is related to the woman he knows in the present. He finally accepts everything mysterious and perplexing about her character and agrees to attempt a renewal of their marriage by making the planned vacation trip with her to the place where they had spent their honeymoon.

Bluebeard's Eighth Wife (Paramount, 1938)
Screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, from a play by Alfred Savoir; cinematography: Leo Tover; set design: Hans Dreier, Robert Usher; costume design: Travis Banton; music: Frederick Hollander, Werner R. Heymann.

With Claudette Colbert (Nicole de Loiselle), Gary Cooper (Michael Brandon), Edward Everett Horton (Marquis de Loiselle), David Niven (Albert de Regnier).

Millionaire Michael Brandon proposes to Nicole de Loiselle, whose noble family is now impoverished. Nicole reluctantly accepts at first, but then refuses when she learns that Michael has been married seven times before. Because of what the money would mean to her father, Nicole finally enters into the marriage, but with a pre-nuptial divorce agreement that grants her a much better settlement than that given any of the previous wives. Still, Nicole seeks even more of a superior position over Michael: she denies him sex after marriage in the secret hope of making him truly love her. The trick enrages Michael and, after the inevitable divorce from Nicole, he suffers a nervous breakdown, apparently brought on by sexual frustration. Nicole finally has him where she wants him, namely in a straitjacket and confined to an insane asylum. With Michael thus subdued, Nicole is able to convince him of true love's advantages.

Ninotchka (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939)
Screenplay: Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and Walter Reisch, from a story by Melchior Lengyel; cinematography: William Daniels; set design: Cedric Gibbons; costume design: Adrian; music: Werner R. Heymann.

With Greta Garbo (Ninotchka), Melvyn Douglas (Count Leon D'Algout), Ina Claire (Grand Duchess Swana), Sig Ruman (Iranoff), Felix Bressart (Buljanoff), Alexander Granach (Kopalski), Bela Lugosi (Razinin), Edwin Maxwell (Mercier, the jeweler).

A Soviet trade commission made up of Iranoff, Buljanoff, and Kopalski arrive in Paris to sell czarist treasures for the sake of their country's failing economy. French Count Leon D'Algout, the kept man of White Russian Grand Duchess Swana, brings an injunction against the sale of the treasures because they contain many jewels that once belonged to Swana. In the meantime, he also seduces the three emissaries into the decadent ways of Western bourgeois culture. To put them back on the right path, an "envoy extraordinaire" arrives from Moscow: the fiercely dedicated idealist Ninotchka, a woman who insists that no issue be made of her womanhood.

Leon is immediately attracted to her, but finds seduction a much tougher business with this new comrade. He finally wins her over with a string of silly jokes and an unintended pratfall that causes her to burst out with a long-suppressed laughter. But much as she learns to appreciate Leon's giddy irresponsibility, he also responds to her seriousness, so the two find themselves in a situation which seems to admit of no practical solution: neither can fully move to the world of the other. A false resolution is realized when Swana confronts Ninotchka and offers to drop the court battle for the jewels if Ninotchka will leave for Moscow immediately and in effect give Leon back to Swana. Ninotchka agrees.

Back in Moscow Ninotchka and the three emissaries gather to celebrate their memories of Paris. Ninotchka receives a letter from Leon, all of it censored but the opening greeting and final salutation. Ninotchka still defends her country, but all four comrades are clearly dispirited. A short time later Ninotchka, is ordered by her boss Razinin to Constantinople where there once again seems to be trouble with a trade commission made up of Iranoff, Buljanoff, and Kopalski. In Constantinople, Ninotchka discovers that Leon is once more behind the problem. He threatens that he will corrupt every Soviet trade delegation in the world if she does not stay with him: she says she will accede to his wishes for the good of her country. But just as the lovers are finally united, a discord is struck in the outside world: Kopalski marches before the restaurant that he and his two comrades own, wearing a sandwich board that reads "Iranoff and Buljanoff unfair to Kopalski."

The Shop Around the Corner (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1940)
Screenplay: Samson Raphaelson, from a play by Nikolaus Laszlo; cinematography: William Daniels; set design: Cedric Gibbons; music: Werner R. Heymann.

With Margaret Sullavan (Klara Novak), James Stewart (Alfred Kralik), Frank Morgan (Mr. Matuschek), Felix Bressart (Pirovitch), Joseph Schildkraut (Ferencz Vadas), William Tracy (Pepi Katona), Sara Haden (Flora), Inez Courtney (Ilona), Edwin Maxwell (Doctor), Charles Halton (Detective), Charles Smith (Rudy).

The story of Mr. Matuschek and the people who work for him in his Budapest leather goods shop: Alfred Kralik, head clerk and almost like a son to Mr. Matuschek; Pirovitch, family man and benevolent ironist, who exercises his irony as a way of submitting to the demands of his job while maintaining an independent sense of self; Ferencz Vadas, a flashy dresser, who clearly sees himself as superior to all his coworkers; warmly maternal Flora; sprightly Ilona; and wily errand-boy Pepi, who yearns to be a clerk. Into this group comes Klara Novak, desperately looking for a job. Kralik kindly tells her that they have no need for additional help, but she nonetheless manages to land a job directly from Mr. Matuschek himself by unintentional flattery: she manages to sell a musical cigarette box that Mr. Matuschek had wanted to stock until Kralik insisted it was not the kind of merchandise that their shop should carry.

Six months later, around Christmas, the initial conflict between Klara and Kralik has become openly hostile, while Mr. Matuschek's once paternal regard for Kralik has so degenerated that he finally fires Kralik. Earlier Kralik has confided to Pirovitch about an anonymous correspondence with an unidentified woman he regards as intellectually and culturally superior to most people, that is, a perfect match for Kralik. He was supposed to meet her for the first time on this very day at a restaurant, but now without a job he feels too depressed to keep the appointment. He does go to the restaurant, but stays outside where he meets Pirovitch. Naturally not as anxious as Kralik, Pirovitch looks inside the restaurant to discover Klara as the unidentified woman. Kralik regards this discovery as the appropriate end for a terrible day, but reminded by Pirovitch that Klara had after all written the once-admired letters, Kralik goes into the restaurant. Still keeping his identity as her correspondent secret, Kralik is rebuffed by Klara as an intruder and summarily dismissed as an insignificant clerk.

Mr. Matuschek in the meantime learns from a detective that his wife has been having an affair with one of his clerks, not Kralik as he had suspected, but Vadas. Depressed that he has not only been betrayed by his wife, but that he himself has in effect betrayed the filial loyalty of Kralik, Mr. Matuschek tries to shoot himself, an attempt that is stopped by Pepi, who has returned fortuitously late from an errand. Hospitalized for melancholia, Mr. Matuschek asks Kralik's forgiveness and appoints him acting manager of the store. Pepi seizes on Mr. Matuschek's generosity to wrangle an appointment as a clerk. Klara, already distraught by the apparent snub from her anonymous correspondent, faints when she discovers Kralik as manager and must, like Mr. Matuschek, take to her sick bed. Here she receives a letter which explains why her correspondent did not identify himself at the restaurant: he claims he was jealous of Kralik! Reassured by his concluding promise that he will make himself known to her in the very near future, Klara happily returns to work.

Christmas Eve. Mr. Matuschek has left his sick bed to witness the only thing he feels can return him to health: excellent business. The store does in fact have a banner day, and Mr. Matuschek rewards all his employees with fine bonuses. Facing the dreary prospect of a Christmas Eve all alone, Mr. Matuschek invites to dinner the new errand boy, who is all alone in the big city. Left alone with Klara in the shop, Kralik tells her that he has met her fiancée and discovered him to be fat, bald, and out of work. Klara is initially confused and disappointed, but when Kralik finally identifies himself as the actual correspondent, she admits to being still confused, but no longer disappointed.

That Uncertain Feeling (United Artists, 1941)

Screenplay: Donald Ogden Stewart and Walter Reisch, from a play by Victorien Sardou and Emile de Najac; cinematography: George Barnes; set design: Alexander Golitzen; music: Werner R. Heymann.

With Merle Oberon (Jill Baker), Melvyn Douglas (Larry Baker), Burgess Meredith (Sebastian), Alan Mowbray (Dr. Vengard), Harry Davenport (Attorney Jones), Sig Ruman (Mr. Kofka), Eve Arden (Sally, Jones' secretary).

A remake of *Kiss Me Again* (1925) that pretty much follows the plot of the original, but with two significant departures: wife Jill Baker's dissatisfaction with her marriage is expressed by convulsive hiccoughs that send her to psychiatrist Dr. Vengard for help; in the fight staged before the lawyer's secretary to create grounds for divorce, husband Larry, after getting drunk, actually does strike his wife.

To Be Or Not To Be (United Artists, 1942)

Screenplay: Edwin Justus Mayer, from a story by Melchior Lengyel and Ernst Lubitsch; cinematography: Rudolph Mate; set design: Vincent Korda; music: Werner R. Heymann.

With Carole Lombard (Maria Tura), Jack Benny (Joseph Tura), Robert Stack (Lieutenant Stanislav Sobinski), Felix Bressart (Greenberg), Sig Ruman (Colonel Ehrhardt), Stanley Ridges (Professor Siletsky), Lionel Atwill (Rawitch), Tom Dugan (Bronski-"Hitler"), Charles Halton (Dobosh), Henry Victor (Captain Schultz).

In 1939 Adolf Hitler appears to visit downtown Warsaw all by himself and look in the window of a delicatessen. How could this be? a voice-over narration asks. The explanation shifts the scene to "Gestapo headquarters," but this is a misleading explanation, for these headquarters are in fact the stage set of a new anti-Nazi play the Theater Polski is rehearsing. "Hitler," actually a minor actor named Bronski, had gone into downtown Warsaw primarily to test the effectiveness of his make-up and costume. There is much argument in the company about how the play is to be performed, but this is all brought to an end when the Polish government, fearful of offending the Germans, cancels the play.

The troupe in the meantime carries on life as normal: supreme egotist Maria Tura, leading lady of the company, begins a dalliance with Lieutenant Stanislav Sobinski, whom she has meet her in her dressing room whenever her husband, leading man and even greater egotist Joseph Tura, begins his soliloquy as Hamlet. Tura is appropriately outraged by this response to his acting, but he does not know the real reason for the officer's departure. Soon this triangle plot reaches its moment of crisis: Sobinski, taking Maria's performance as his lover as something more real than Maria intends, wants to talk things over with Joseph. The conversation never takes place because of the Nazi invasion of Warsaw, the results of which are shown obliquely but nonetheless realistically.

After the start of the war, Sobinski escapes to England where he becomes a member of the Polish squadron of the R.A.F. There an apparent Polish patriot, a Professor Siletsky, gets the names and addresses of relatives of the squadron still living in Poland. After Siletsky's departure for Poland, Sobinski realizes that he must in fact be a German spy who now has in his possession a list of names of people with ties to the resistance movement. Sent to Warsaw with the mission to stop Siletsky, Sobinski immediately contacts Maria. Joseph, outraged that he is not managing this whole business, soon concocts an elaborate plot in which Maria pretends to initiate an affair with Siletsky in order to get at his files while Joseph in the backroom of the troupe's theater (now disguised as Gestapo headquarters) impersonates Colonel Ehrhardt in an interview with Siletsky. Siletsky is eventually killed on the stage of the Theater Polski while his list of names is recovered by Maria.

To secure safe passage from Poland for the now-endangered troupe, Joseph next impersonates Siletsky in an interview with the actual Colonel Ehrhardt. Ehrhardt is submissively ingratiating until the real Siletsky's body is discovered in the Theater Polski by the Nazis. Tura as Siletsky is now in great danger, but a performance in which members of the troupe impersonate a Gestapo corps saves him, while a subsequent performance in which Bronski impersonates Hitler for real gains safe passage for the entire troupe to England.

Heaven Can Wait (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1943)

Screenplay: Samson Raphaelson, from a play by Laszlo Bus-Fekete; cinematography (Technicolor): Edward Cronjager; set design: James Basevi, Leland Fuller; costume design: Rene Hubert; music: Alfred Newman.

With Don Ameche (Henry Van Cleve), Gene Tierney (Martha), Charles Coburn (Hugo Van Cleve, Grandpa), Clara Blandick (Grandmother Van Cleve), Louis Calhern (Randolph Van Cleve), Spring Byington (Bertha Van Cleve), Allyn Joslyn (Albert Van Cleve), Michael Ames (Jack Van Cleve), Dickie Moore (Henry, age 15), Dickie Jones (Albert, age 15), Eugene Pallette (E. F. Strabel), Marjorie Main (Mrs. Strabel), Helene Reynolds (Peggy Nash), Laird Cregar (His Excellency), Signe Hasso (Mademoiselle).

The life story of Henry Van Cleve as he tells it to "His Excellency" in the anteroom to Hell. Three brief sequences establish Henry's relations with women through events in his childhood. The rest of the film unfolds through a series of episodes centering on Henry's birthdays, generally with each birthday about a decade apart.

On his fifteenth birthday Henry is initiated into adulthood by getting drunk with Mademoiselle, the family's French maid. Although the maid's efforts in education are clearly appreciated by Grandpa, the rest of the family indignantly concludes she must be dismissed.

On his twenty-sixth birthday, Henry, who has become the bane of his parents' existence because of his incessant infatuations with showgirls, suddenly discovers the woman of his dreams, but doesn't know her identity. At his own birthday party he discovers that the woman is Martha, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Strabel, meatpackers from Kansas. Martha is at the party because she has been recently affianced to Henry's cousin Albert, but Henry forces her to admit that she is in fact in love with Henry. Impelled by this confession, Henry, in front of the entire gathering of birthday guests, picks up Martha and carries her out the door to elope. Grandpa sends money after them via the butler so that they may have a happy honeymoon.

Shortly before his thirty-sixth birthday, Henry learns that Martha has gone back to her parents because of his infidelities. Spurred on by Grandpa, Henry takes the next train to Kansas, together with Grandpa, to convince Martha to return to him. Sneaking into her bedroom at night, he does in fact convince her, chiefly because he is aided by Grandpa. Once more in front of her unsuspecting family, he sweeps her off her feet and whisks her out the door for a second "elopement."

On his fiftieth birthday, Henry visits a showgirl, Peggy Nash, whom the viewer is led to believe he might be courting. In fact, the showgirl has been going out with Henry's son Jack, and she doesn't hesitate to mock Henry's age and his old-fashioned ways. He does nonetheless buy her off, although as he later learns from his son this wasn't necessary since Jack has discovered a new and more enticing showgirl.

A year later, on Henry's fifty-first birthday and the twenty-fifth anniversary of his wedding to Martha, Henry becomes jealous when he walks in on the end of a phone conversation Martha is having. The caller is in fact Martha's doctor, as she confesses to Henry after teasing him a bit. She minimizes the importance of the call, which Henry accepts, but as they dance to celebrate their anniversary Henry's voice-over narration announces that this was the last anniversary he was to spend with Martha.

On his sixtieth birthday, Henry tries to convince Jack that he needs a young person to read to him in his old age. Jack suggests a Yale man, but Henry has a twenty-four-year-old girl in mind. The whole project is dropped when Henry accidentally takes off his library shelf the book that had brought Martha and Henry together in the first place.

On his seventieth birthday, Henry dies after having his temperature taken by a beautiful nurse.

Back in the foyer to Hell His Excellency tells Henry that they do not cater to his class of sinner there and that he should give the other place a try. The film ends with Henry departing for Heaven via an elevator.

Cluny Brown (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1946)
Screenplay: Samuel Hoffenstein and Elizabeth Reinhardt, from the novel by Margery Sharp; cinematography: Joseph La Shelle; set design: Lyle Wheeler, J. Russell Spencer; costume design: Bonnie Cashin; music: Cyril Mockridge.

With Charles Boyer (Adam Belinski), Jennifer Jones (Cluny Brown), Peter Lawford (Andrew Carmel), Helen Walker (Betty Cream), Reginald Owen (Sir Henry Carmel), Margaret Bannerman (Lady Carmel), Sara Allgood (Mrs. Maile), Ernest Cossart (Syrette), Richard Hayden (Wilson), Una O'Connor (Mrs. Wilson), C. Aubrey Smith (Col. Duff Graham), Reginald Gardiner (Hilary Ames), Billy Bevan (Uncle Arn), Michael Dyne (John Frewen).

Czech émigré Adam Belinski arrives at the home of Hilary Ames in search of a mutual friend, but Ames is little interested in Belinski because he is about to give a cocktail party and finds himself with a malodorously clogged sink. Cluny Brown, whose uncle Arn is a plumber, arrives in answer to Ames' emergency call because Uncle Arn is away. Ames is suspicious of her unconventionality, while Belinski, intrigued by her social naiveté, supports it. Cluny does in fact manage to unstop the sink, and all three celebrate by drinking martinis, Cluny's first. After she has become a bit tipsy, her uncle arrives to find what he regards as a compromising situation. He takes her away, vowing to send her into service.

At Ames' party Andrew Carmel and his two friends, Betty Cream and John Frewen, discover Belinski asleep in Ames' bedroom. Andrew almost immediately recognizes Belinski as the famous Czech professor and philosopher who has been forced to emigrate because of the Nazis. When Belinski wakes up, Andrew, overstating the possible danger to Belinski, insists that Belinski become the house guest of Andrew's parents at their country manor. Belinski, who was about to be evicted from his apartment because he couldn't pay the rent, gladly accepts the offer of security.

On the way to the country for her new job as maid at Friars Carmel, the estate of Andrew's parents, Cluny Brown meets Colonel Duff Graham, a neighbor of the Carmels. He mistakes Cluny as a house guest of the Carmels and delivers her to Sir Henry and Lady Alice, who continue to think that Cluny must be a house guest, even though they do not know her, because she has been brought by their neighbor. They soon realize their mistake when Cluny talks of her duties, but they do not criticize her for any improper behavior.

An actual house guest arrives in the person of Belinski, and Sir Henry and Lady Alice accept him with as much ease and grace as they had shown to Cluny. Cluny, however, is far more surprised to discover Belinski at Friars Carmel: serving her first dinner, she accidentally drops the tray from the shock of seeing him. Without explaining to her employers that he and Cluny had met before, Belinski manages to save Cluny's job for her. Cluny is thankful, but feels they cannot be friends because of the differences in their social positions.

After a while Cluny thinks she has fallen in love with the village pharmacist Wilson, a smug and comfortably settled middle-aged man. Cluny, who was orphaned at an early age, likes everything about the Wilson household, most especially the mother, who is likely to fall asleep and snore during afternoon tea. Belinski doesn't like Wilson and tries to convince Cluny by an extended metaphorical speech that Wilson is not the man for her, but Cluny misunderstands the metaphor and thinks that Belinski is actually endorsing Wilson.

Betty Cream arrives at Friars Carmel on invitation from Lady Alice, and Andrew arrives shortly thereafter, not at all happy to find Betty there. It seems that he has asked her to marry him several times, but she always refuses at the same time that she seems to encourage a continued courtship. Andrew confides his frustration to Belinski, who can offer little advice.

At this point the two story lines reach related climaxes of social embarrassment. At a birthday party for Mrs. Wilson, Cluny, responding to noisy plumbing that seems to be threatening the success of the party, volunteers to fix it as her gift to Mrs. Wilson. This offer is regarded as an even greater breach of decorum than the noisy plumbing itself, so that Cluny's engagement to Mr. Wilson, which was to be announced that night at the party, is indefinitely postponed. At Friars Carmel later the same night Belinski turns up in Betty Cream's bedroom to plead Andrew's case, but Betty, annoyed by Belinski's insistence, nonchalantly screams to drive Belinski from her room. The screams bring both Andrew and Lady Alice to Betty's door just as Belinski is exiting. Lady Alice takes control of the situation, calmly sending everyone to bed. Alone with Betty, she advises her in a way that cannot be contradicted that it is time she accepted Andrew's proposal. Betty assents.

The next day Belinski decides it is time to leave. Cluny is nowhere to be seen because of her humiliation over the birthday party incident, so he leaves a present behind for her. On receiving the present, Cluny runs after Belinski and catches up with him at the train station. Encouraged by this show of feeling, Belinski tells Cluny to get into the train and leave with him. In the train he proposes to her by telling her he is going to write successful mystery stories which will earn him enough money to build a large mansion with exquisitely complicated plumbing she can work on to her heart's content.

In a brief silent epilogue we see the success of Belinski's efforts as a mystery author and the fruit of the marriage in Cluny's pregnancy.

That Lady in Ermine (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1948)
Screenplay: Samson Raphaelson, from an operetta by Rudolf Schanzer and Ernest Wallach; songs: Leo Robin (lyrics), Frederick Hollander (music); cinematography (Technicolor): Leon Shamroy; choreography: Hermes Pan; set design: Lyle Wheeler, J. Russell Spencer; Costume design: Rene Hubert. (Lubitsch died during filming; the film was completed by Otto Preminger.)

With Betty Grable (Angelina/Francesca), Douglas Fairbanks Jr. (Colonel Ladislaus Karoly Teglash/Duke of Ravenna), Cesar Romero (Mario), Walter Abel (Major Horvath/Benevenuto), Reginald Gardiner (Alberto), Harry Davenport (Luigi).

The Principality of Bergamo is invaded by Hungarian Colonel Ladislaus Karoly Teglash and his troops on the wedding day of its ruler, Angelina, to Mario, a man she has had to raise to her own rank for the wedding. In the castle Ladislaus instantly falls in love with Francesca, Angelina's ancestor from three hundred years before, who appears in a life-sized portrait apparently wearing nothing other than an ermine coat. He learns Francesca's story, which is shown to us in flashback: in a similar invasion by the Duke of Ravenna, Francesca appeared in the duke's tent in bare feet and an ermine coat; the Duke subsequently appears to the people of Bergamo to grant them their freedom, a gesture possibly made from love of Francesca, although he has been stabbed in the back. In the present Ladislaus discovers that Angelina is her ancestor's exact lookalike. When cowardly Mario, who had fled at the invasion, is captured, Ladislaus promises Angelina he will free Mario unharmed if she will appear to him in bare feet and an ermine coat. Angelina does not go to Ladislaus, but the figure of Francesca from the painting does. Jealous Mario, now released, refuses to believe Angelina that nothing has happened between her and Ladislaus, so Angelina has the marriage annulled and immediately marries Ladislaus.

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Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy

William Paul

Foreword by Andrew Sarris

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KCP
A King's Crown Paperback
Columbia University Press/New York

Printed in U.S.A.

ISBN 0-231-05681-8